Time and Eternity

A Study of the ‘Accidental Temporalist’ View

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TIME AND ETERNITY: A STUDY OF THE 'ACCIDENTAL TEMPORALIST' VIEW

A Thesis Presented
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Aberdeen

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December 2013
I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree, and that all quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

R. Keith Loftin, 09 December 2013
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ABSTRACT

I explicate the model of divine eternality developed by William Lane Craig—‘accidental temporalism’—and defend its plausibility.

In chapter one I provide an overview of several foundational issues relevant to the development of my thesis (e.g., methodology, the relevant biblical data, and key definitions).

In chapter two I trace the development within the Christian philosophical theological tradition of the two major views of God’s relationship to time: atemporalism and temporalism. This survey draws out several concepts influential in the tradition—e.g., Neo-Platonism, divine simplicity, and the emerging importance of the metaphysical nature of time—as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional views. This reveals the motivation for accidental temporalism.

Having thus set the stage for accidental temporalism, in chapter three I offer an exposition of accidental temporalism. This involves a philosophical consideration of the metaphysical nature of time itself and the implications for Craig’s affirmation of the dynamic theory of time.

In chapter four I evaluate, on their own terms, several purely analytical philosophical objections which have been raised against accidental temporalism. I begin with two peremptory objections taken from the professional literature. I also develop two original objections, in response to which I consider possible responses.

In chapter five I assume the plausibility of accidental temporalism and advance the discussion by arguing that accidental temporalism is not only internally consistent but possesses tremendous explanatory power and scope. I consider accidental temporalism’s
implications for familiar theological problems as well as challenges to the coherence of Christian theology.

Chapter six concludes the thesis by offering a summary of the overall argument and drawing a few modest conclusions for the God and time discussion. I will also point out some possibilities for future research emerging from this project.
Preface

Christians typically conceive of God’s eternity in one of two ways: either God is

*in* time (‘temporalism’) or He is *outside of* time (‘atemporalism’). There has long been

considerable disagreement, though, over which of these conceptions is correct. The

strengths and the weaknesses of both temporalism and atemporalism have been

repeatedly expounded. In this thesis I set out to explicate and defend a certain hybrid

conception of God’s relationship to time which seeks to preserve the strengths of both

temporalism and atemporalism, whilst avoiding their respective weaknesses. Developed

by William Lane Craig, this conception, called ‘accidental temporalism,’ maintains that

God is timeless *sans* creation, but temporal subsequent to creation. In short, Craig argues

that God is *contingently* timeless: ‘on a relational view of time God would exist

timelessly and independently prior to creation; at creation, which he has willed from

eternity to appear temporally, time begins, and God subjects himself to time by being

related to changing things.’¹ My purpose in this thesis is to argue that accidental

temporalism constitutes a philosophically robust understanding of God’s relation to time

that is logically coherent, can hold its place despite the philosophical objections which

have been raised against it, and is not only consistent with but sheds considerable light on

key Christian doctrines.

Both temporalism and atemporalism have deep roots in the Christian

philosophical theological tradition. As William Hasker notes, ‘the major alternative

positions on the underlying issues had been formulated by about the end of the sixteenth

The discussion continues along these traditional contours. Following the publication in 1970 of Nelson Pike’s *God and Timelessness*, which prompted analytic philosophers of religion to turn their attention to God’s relation to time, there has appeared in the professional literature a spate of works defending both temporalism and atemporalism. One needs only to survey some of the recent publications in contemporary philosophical theology to find considerations of each view. It is noteworthy, however, that to date Craig’s accidental temporalism has not received any sustained treatment outside of this thesis.

To appreciate fully these contemporary philosophical theological contributions which provide the context of and motivation for accidental temporalism, it may prove helpful within each camp to distinguish between offensive and defensive strategies. Needless to say, atemporalists and temporalists alike frequently deploy both strategies in their works, so these categorizations are not always hard and fast.

The defensive strategy of atemporalists tends to take shape around two foci. In the first case, atemporalists endeavor to clarify and restate their view in contemporary philosophical theological terms. For example, in their landmark 1981 article ‘Eternity,’ Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann construe eternity as timeless but nevertheless involving ‘atemporal duration,’ because the life of an atemporal God has duration, albeit not temporal duration. Brian Leftow, in his *Time and Eternity*, similarly articulates eternity in terms of an ‘atemporal reference frame’ in which God’s ‘eternal present’ is ‘temporally omnipresent and omnicontiguous, as if eternity were a higher dimension in

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which He and temporal things coexist.”  

If so, Leftow maintains, then ‘an eternal being could be one that somehow lives at once (“\textit{tota simul}”) all moments of a life whose moments are ordered as earlier and later,’ which view he terms ‘Quasi-Temporal Eternity.’  

In her explication of atemporalism, Katherin Rogers rejects any notion of durational eternity because ‘[e]ternity as duration can be described without contradiction only so long as “duration” is stripped of any meaning by which to distinguish duration from the lack of it.’  

She therefore defends ‘Anselmian eternalism,’ a conception of eternity on which ‘God is “timeless” in that His life is not stretched out four-dimensionally as our lives are…[rather] all of time is “contained in” divine eternity, which is to say God knows and acts causally upon all of space-time in one, eternal, act.’  

Paul Helm mounts a defense of atemporalism that is very similar to that of Rogers.  

Prompted by the attacks of Murray MacBeath,  

Helm defends an atemporalist account of divine omniscience in terms of God’s knowledge of indexicals (i.e., linguistic expressions the content of which is dependent upon context, for example: \textit{It is now raining}) arguing that God’s knowledge need not be possessed in propositional form.  

Claiming that knowledge of indexicals involves one in the flux of temporality, William Alston, in his ‘Does God Have Beliefs?’ attempts to circumvent the problem by arguing for a view of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 120.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Katherin A. Rogers, ‘Eternity Has No Duration,’ \textit{Religious Studies} 30 (1994): 12.
\end{itemize}
divine knowledge he calls ‘divine intuitive knowledge,’ whereby God does not have
beliefs.11 Building on Alston’s argument for divine intuition, Gregory Ganssle further
argues that the ‘direct awareness’ of God is not merely consistent with but in fact entails
the atemporalist position. This is because, he argues, direct awareness cannot span time,
yet God knows everything via direct awareness.12 John Yates’ The Timelessness of God is
a systematic defense of atemporalism, making particular effort to rebut the charge that an
atemporal God cannot be a personal God.13 Yates argues that ‘the theist may immediately
grant that concepts such as memory and anticipation could not apply to a timeless being.
But this is not to admit that the key concepts of consciousness and knowledge are
inapplicable to such a deity… An atemporal deity could possess maximal understanding,
awareness, and knowledge in a single, all-embracing vision of reality.’14 Interestingly,
although he is not an atemporalist, William Hasker offers a limited defense of
atemporalism in his ‘Concerning the Intelligibility of “God is Timeless,”’ arguing that the
atemporalist position is perfectly coherent and intelligible.15

The second focus of the atemporalists’ defensive strategy is to explain how an
atemporal God can be causally active in a world of flux and time yet nevertheless remain
timeless. Not surprisingly, the lines between these defensive foci are not hard and fast.
For example, beyond their construal of eternity in terms of atemporal duration, in their

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12 Gregory Ganssle, ‘Atemporality and the Mode of Divine Knowledge,’ International Journal for the
Philosophy of Religion 34 (1993): 171-180. See also Ganssle’s ‘Direct Awareness and God’s Experience of
170-195.
‘Eternity’ Stump and Kretzmann also propose an innovative notion according to which ‘a simultaneity relationship between two relata of which one is eternal and the other temporal’ obtains: ‘eternal-temporal simultaneity.’ Borrowing from modern physics the notion of simultaneity as being defined relative to reference frames, they maintain in Boethian fashion that ‘from a temporal standpoint, the present is ET-simultaneous with the whole infinite extent of an eternal entity’s life. From the standpoint of eternity, every time is present, co-occurrent with the whole of infinite atemporal duration.’\(^{16}\) In their later piece ‘Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald’ Stump and Kretzmann defend this position, reaffirming their characterization of eternity as ‘genuine, paradigmatic duration…[which] must be fully realized duration, none of which is already lost or not yet gained—an infinite duration,’ where ‘temporal duration is only apparent duration.’\(^{17}\) John Zeis accepts ET-simultaneity as a promising basis for understanding eternity and works to develop further the notion in his ‘The Concept of Eternity.’\(^{18}\) In his ‘Roots of Eternity,’ Brian Leftow argues that a genuinely Boethian account of eternity must make appeal to something akin to ET-simultaneity, but concludes that E-T simultaneity itself is unsuccessful.\(^{19}\) He thus rejects Stump and Kretzmann’s view in favour of ‘the paradoxical suggestion that temporal events are eternally simultaneous.’\(^{20}\) Leftow argues that all events being actual relative to God implies their simultaneity (which is not possible in any temporal reference frame), which means they must share an atemporal

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\(^{16}\) Stump and Kretzmann, ‘Eternity,’ 441.


reference frame with God.\textsuperscript{21} Paul Helm, in his ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ offers another standard atemporalist explanation of how an eternal God is related to the temporal world. Eschewing the language of God’s willing in time to act, Helm argues rather that from God’s (single) eternal act come temporal results: ‘The correct way to think of God’s eternally willing something in time is to think of one eternal act of will with numerous temporally scattered effects.’\textsuperscript{22}

In terms of offensive strategy, atemporalists offer a variety of arguments for their position. These arguments generally center on three main foci, the first of which involves the perennial problem of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Three examples will suffice for present purposes. Paul Helm, in his ‘Timelessness and Foreknowledge,’ argues that although the notion of an omniscient timeless knower is logically coherent it remains true that what God knows beforehand is ‘unchangeable, and so necessary…hence there cannot be free will, even if God’s knowledge of human actions is timeless.’\textsuperscript{23} Thus on this account, strictly speaking there is no ‘problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.’ Brian Leftow, however, maintains that atemporalism can preserve both divine foreknowledge and human freedom. By appealing to Boethian eternity, he argues that on atemporalism ‘even if it is a fixed fact that God believes that $P$, there is nothing which we could do if He did not believe that $P$ which we cannot do given that He believes that $P$,’ which Leftow takes to be sufficient for human

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 164. Leftow further develops this view in his Time and Eternity.


freedom. Katherin Rogers in a number of articles argues that atemporalism furnishes a means of reconciling foreknowledge and creaturely freedom, once again appealing to an Anselmian conception of eternity: ‘by positing that God knows your choice from his perspective in eternity, we can preserve both divine foreknowledge and human freedom.’ Laura Garcia offers much the same argument in her ‘Timelessness, Omniscience, and Tenses.’

The second focus of the atemporalist offensive strategy is to argue that atemporalism is demanded in order to preserve the fullness of divine being. Brian Leftow makes this case, for example, in his Time and Eternity: ‘it would most befit the claim that God is a perfect being for God to be timeless,’ because temporal existence is metaphysically inferior existence. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann agree: ‘No life, even a sempiternal life, that is imperfect in its being possessed with the radical incompleteness entailed by temporal existence could be the mode of existence of an absolutely perfect being.’ Hugh McCann makes the same argument in his ‘God Beyond

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Time.’\textsuperscript{29} Paul Helm, in his contribution to \textit{God & Time: Four Views} also argues along these lines, appealing to ‘the basic theistic intuition that God’s fullness is such that he possesses the whole of his life \textit{together}…[whereas] the temporalist view…does not do justice to the nature of God’s being.’\textsuperscript{30} Daniel Hill likewise argues that ‘every divine being is timeless, since every divine being is maximally great.’\textsuperscript{31}

The third focus of the atemporalist offensive strategy is to charge that temporalism results in or entails various unwelcome theological conclusions. In the first instance, Paul Helm argues in his \textit{Eternal God} that the temporalist view ‘runs up against the idea of an actual infinite…therefore, either there was a time when God began to exist, which is impossible, or God exists timelessly.’\textsuperscript{32} Helm elsewhere charges that temporalism ‘would seem to strongly favour, if not actually entail, some form of Arianism.’\textsuperscript{33} William Alston argues that rejecting atemporalism disallows belief in the Christian doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo} because a temporal God could never have a sufficient reason for creating at any given moment.\textsuperscript{34} Hugh McCann, in his \textit{Creation and the Sovereignty of God}, claims that temporalism threatens God’s omniscience.\textsuperscript{35} Finally, numerous atemporalists including William Mann, Brian Leftow, and Paul Helm, to name

\textsuperscript{32} Helm, \textit{Eternal God}, pp. 37-38.
just a few, contend that temporalism undermines God’s immutability.\textsuperscript{36} John Tomkinson argues that temporalism ‘involves the attribution of limitations to God’ and is thus ‘incoherent unless there is no way of describing God which is coherent and which does not involve the ascription to him of even greater limitations or restrictions upon the exercise of his nature and power.’\textsuperscript{37} Steven Cowan’s ‘A Reductio Ad Absurdum of Divine Temporality’ formulates a keen argument against temporalism: given the temporalist assumption that ‘God has always existed’ and the impossibility of traversing an actually infinite series of moments, it follows that ‘the temporalist assumption that God has always existed is false.’\textsuperscript{38}

Temporalists’ publications may likewise be divided into defensive and offensive strategies. In terms of the former, temporalists have two main foci. The first of these is to rebut the attacks of the atemporalists. For example, Thomas Senor’s ‘Divine Temporality and Creation \textit{Ex Nihilo}’ argues that a temporal God can in fact rationally decide to create at a particular time.\textsuperscript{39} William Lane Craig’s ‘On the Alleged Metaphysical Superiority of Timelessness’ is a response to the atemporalist charge that a temporal deity is metaphysically inferior to an atemporal deity.\textsuperscript{40} In his ‘Divine Timelessness and Necessary Existence,’ Craig similarly takes on the atemporalist claim that necessary

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existence entails timelessness so that a temporal God cannot exist necessarily.\textsuperscript{41} \L uboš Rojka observes that there may be ‘some essentially temporal experiences [which] are really valuable and enriching.’ If so, ‘God knows them, but then he must be in time.’\textsuperscript{42} Linda Zagzebski’s ‘Eternity and Fatalism’ likewise rebuts the argument that atemporalism is required in order to solve the fatalist dilemma: ‘there are many reasons why a Christian philosopher should be attracted to the traditional conception of divine timelessness, but…the need to escape fatalism is not one of them.’\textsuperscript{43} Richard Holland, in his \textit{God, Time and the Incarnation}, confutes the claim that temporalism entails heresies such as Arianism.\textsuperscript{44}

Temporalists’ second main defensive focus is to set upon objectionable features of atemporalism. For example, Richard Swinburne’s ‘God and Time’ is an attempt to demonstrate the incoherence of atemporalism and, given that incoherence, to argue that ‘we must revert to the doctrine that God is everlasting [i.e., temporal], which we must read as claiming that God exists throughout all periods of time.’\textsuperscript{45} J. R. Lucas likewise maintains that the notion of an atemporal God is incoherent.\textsuperscript{46} In his ‘Eternity Again,’ Delmas Lewis rejects Stump and Kretzmann’s doctrine of E-T Simultaneity as a model of

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how an atemporal God relates to temporal reality on the grounds that it is multiply flawed.  

Paul Fitzgerald similarly attacks the internal consistency of Stump and Kretzmann’s model in his ‘Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity.’ William Lane Craig’s ‘The Eternal Present and Stump-Kretzmann Eternity’ is likewise a rejection of the E-T Simultaneity model for conceiving of a timeless God’s relation to the temporal world. In his ‘Eternity and the Special Theory of Relativity’ Alan Padgett argues that any attempt to establish a simultaneity relation between an absolutely timeless God and our changing world of time is destined to fail: ‘The “present” of a timeless eternity occurs neither at nor in any time, since eternity is…absolutely timeless. Eternity, then, cannot be present because it cannot be at any time.’

Alvin Plantinga argues that the sort of Boethian response defended by many atemporalists (especially Brian Leftow) is problematic as a solution to the dilemma of theological fatalism. In her ‘Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will,’ Linda Zagzebski develops much the same argument. Elsewhere, Alan Padgett raises a panoply of challenges to the latter’s doctrine of Quasi-Temporal Eternity. In his ‘The Absence of a Timeless God,’ William Hasker attacks atemporalism as being unable to account for

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God’s direct awareness of temporal reality in light of ‘Anselm’s Barrier’ (namely, that God ‘neither exists, nor acts, nor knows in time’).⁵⁴ Hasker’s large-scale defense of temporalism, *God, Time and Knowledge*, argues that given libertarian human freedom the future must be genuinely unfixed or contingent, which seems to imply that God cannot (infallibly) know the future and is therefore in time.⁵⁵ Delmas Lewis, in his ‘Timelessness and Divine Agency’ argues that a timeless God is not capable of sustaining the physical universe in existence.⁵⁶ In his ‘God, Time and Freedom,’ Robert Cook enumerates a number of difficulties with various contemporary accounts of atemporalism, including flawed views of omniscience, divine action, and personhood.⁵⁷

In terms of their offensive strategy, temporalists tend to focus primarily on two lines of argument. In the first instance, temporalists argue that God’s action in the world entails His being temporal. For example, Nicholas Wolterstorff argues in ‘God Everlasting’ that the biblical portrayal of God as ‘acting within human history’ leads us, if we are to accept the picture of God as acting for the renewal of human life, to conceive of God as temporal rather than timeless.⁵⁸ Wolterstorff’s ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality’ offers an updated version of this same argument.⁵⁹ Delmas Lewis’s widely cited doctoral dissertation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ‘God and Time: The

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Concept of Eternity and the Reality of Tense,’ makes great effort to demonstrate that God must be temporal in virtue of his activity within the temporal world. William Hasker’s ‘A Philosophical Perspective’ likewise argues that the atemporal view ‘is not taught in the Bible,’ that ‘the biblical writers undeniably do present God as living, acting and reacting in time,’ and that ‘it is very hard to make clear logical sense of the doctrine [of divine timelessness].’ William Lane Craig contends that ‘in virtue of His creating a temporal world, God comes into a relation with that world the moment it springs into being. Thus…. (God) undergoes an extrinsic change at the moment of creation which draws Him into time.’ In his The Coherence of Theism Richard Swinburne writes that ‘If God had…fixed his intentions “from all eternity” he would be a very lifeless thing; not a person who reacts to men with sympathy or anger, pardon or chastening because he chooses to there and then.’

In the second instance temporalists argue that temporality is entailed by God’s perfect omniscience. Specifically, the idea is that the present is ever changing and, since an omniscient God must know each successive present, then God’s knowledge must be ever changing. Interestingly, the first contemporary philosophical work to argue that an immutable (and timeless) God cannot have genuine knowledge of temporal events was Norman Kretzmann’s (who later became an ardent defender of atemporalism)

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‘Omniscience and Immutability.’⁶⁴ Other examples include William Lane Craig’s ‘Timelessness and Omnitemporality,’ in which Craig argues that ‘timelessness is incompatible with divine omniscience.’⁶⁵ Craig further develops this argument in his contribution to God & Time: Four Views.⁶⁶ In his God, Time, and Eternity, Craig offers a variety of arguments (including the argument from omniscience) against atemporalism.⁶⁷ William Hasker similarly argues, in his ‘The Absence of a Timeless God,’ that ‘divine timelessness is…incoherent…if one holds also that the biblical God is also present to his creation in a unique and intimate fashion.’⁶⁸ Garrett DeWeese’s God and the Nature of Time is a full-scale defense of the temporalist view. Specifically he argues that God is a temporal being who possesses ‘temporal properties and relations’ that are ‘defined with reference to metaphysical…time,’ which in turn is caused by ‘the succession of mental states in God’s conscious life.’⁶⁹ Alan Padgett, in his thorough consideration of the atemporalist position God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time, offers this argument as well.⁷⁰ Stephen Davis likewise seeks to establish conflict between divine omniscience and divine timelessness in his Logic and the Nature of God.⁷¹

In addition to these major offensive and defensive strategies, contemporary atemporalist and temporalist philosophical theologians alike appeal to modern

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developments within the metaphysics of time to support their view. William Lane Craig, for example, claims that ‘theologians and philosophers of religion can advance the discussion of the nature of divine eternity only by tackling the difficult and multifaceted problem of the tensed versus tenseless theory of time.’

In his ‘God and Real Time,’ Craig similarly remarks that ‘if we adopt a B-theory of time, most of the typical arguments against divine timelessness…are doomed to failure…. By contrast, on the A-theory of time, the concept of a timeless God who is really related to the world does seem incoherent.’

It is generally agreed among these contemporary scholars that one’s beliefs about time impose certain constraints upon one’s view of God and time. Stuart Foyle, for example, has shown in substantial detail that ‘we cannot really be B-theorists and divine temporalists, and neither can we really be A-theorists and divine atemporalists.’

Timothy Sansbury likewise observes that ‘a remarkably simple analysis demonstrates that the doctrine that God transcends time [i.e., the atemporal view] requires that all time exist; in other words that God’s temporal transcendence entails the B-theory of time.’

In his ‘Timeless God, Tenseless Time,’ Garrett DeWeese contends ‘that theories of divine atemporality are not…neutral with respect to theories of time, but rather entail a commitment to tenseless time.’

Although the first edition (1988) of Paul Helm’s *Eternal God* contained no mention of the philosophy of time, in his second edition (2010)...

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Helm repeatedly appeals to the B-theory of time.\textsuperscript{77} In his ‘Divine Timeless Eternity’ Helm claims that ‘it makes better sense for the eternalist [i.e., atemporalists] to suppose that God created the temporal order as a B-series.’\textsuperscript{78} Delmas Lewis agrees with Helm and others: ‘the existence of an eternal [i.e., atemporal] God logically depends on the truth of the tenseless account of time.’\textsuperscript{79} In his ‘God and Time: Toward a New Rejection of Divine Timeless Eternity,’ Alan Padgett’s rejection of atemporalism is largely due to that view’s incompatibility with the tensed view of time.\textsuperscript{80} Katherin Rogers likewise argues, in her ‘Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension,’ that

Anselm’s doctrine of divine eternity…does not conflict with the thesis of divine omniscience and it does succeed in solving the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge. And this is because Anselm…adopts what I will call the ‘four-dimensionalist’ theory of time, sometimes also called the ‘tenseless’ theory.\textsuperscript{81}

Rogers makes much the same argument in her ‘Omniscience, Eternity, and Freedom.’\textsuperscript{82} Nicholas Wolterstorff’s ‘God and Time’ argues that ‘God is everlasting [i.e., temporal] rather than eternal [i.e., atemporal],’ that is, that ‘God is not outside of time but that God exists at every time, and that there is temporal succession and flow within God’s own life,’ which Wolterstorff explains in terms of the A-theory of time.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, practically every contemporary philosophical theological treatment of divine eternity—both


\textsuperscript{78} Helm, ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 58.


atemporalist and temporalist alike—appeals to modern developments within the
metaphysics of time to support its view.

As this survey makes clear, the contemporary philosophical theological debate
over God’s relation to time is focused on the atemporalist and temporalist positions.
While these positions do merit careful attention, I submit that there is an apparent gap in
the cutting edge of the contemporary God and time discussion. Despite his extensive
publications on the topic, William Lane Craig’s suggested hybrid conception of God’s
relation to time, accidental temporalism, has, to date, received no sustained treatment in
the professional literature. Indeed, accidental temporalism has received no sustained
treatment outside of this thesis. This is particularly surprising in light of the offensive and
defensive strategies sketched above; Craig’s accidental temporalism makes considerable
effort to preserve the strengths of both atemporalism and temporalism, whilst avoiding
their respective weaknesses. This thesis, therefore, plays a needed role in the
contemporary philosophical theological debate over God’s relation to time
CHAPTER 1:
Introduction and Context

1.1 God and Creation: The Provenance of the God and Time Question

The simplest and, perhaps, most helpful way of approaching a discussion of the nature of divine eternality will be briefly to retrace the question’s provenance: God’s relation to creation. This will prove fruitful since the Christian doctrine of creation naturally raises the question of God’s relation to the created order, including time. I shall then sketch the parameters of my thesis. This will consist primarily in establishing this as a work of Christian philosophical theology and outlining the argument of the chapters that follow.

The Nicene Creed opens with the Christian confession that God is the ‘creator of all things visible and invisible,’ and the Apostles’ Creed also states that God is the ‘maker of heaven and earth.’ The doctrine of creation, which is bedrock to traditional Christian orthodoxy, holds that everything that is not God derives its existence from God. Both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Scriptures place a distinct emphasis on the fact of creation. The Book of Genesis, for example, begins with this cosmogony: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1.1; cf. 1.20-27; 2.4). One reads in Nehemiah the Israelite proclamation before God: ‘You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the heavenly host bows down before You’ (Neh. 9.6). Likewise, the Book of Job majestically presents God as the
Creator of the universe. Here the LORD confronts Job: ‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?’ (Job 38.4-7; cf. 38.8 - 42.6). The Psalmist similarly declares, ‘The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains…for He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers’ (Ps. 24.1-2). Frequently identifying God as the ‘Maker of heaven and earth’ (e.g., 96.5; 115.15; 146.6), the Psalmist writes that ‘before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God’ (90.2; cf. 148.2-6). Isaiah records that God is ‘the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited)’ (Is. 45.18). In distinguishing the LORD from the idols of surrounding nations, Jeremiah emphasizes God’s act of creating: ‘But the LORD is the true God…the gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens. It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens’ (Jer. 10.10-12). This theme of God as the Creator continues throughout the New Testament, as well. One reads in John that ‘all things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being’ (Jn. 1.3; cf. Heb. 1.10). The Apostle Paul similarly identifies God as the one who ‘gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist’ (Rom. 4.17; cf. Heb. 11.3). Or again, in his testimony to the Areopagus in Athens, Paul proclaimed ‘the God who made the world and all things in it…He is Lord of heaven and earth’ (Acts 17.24). That all-inclusive
nature of creation is made clear in the Book of Colossians: ‘For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him’ (Col. 1.16). Finally, in the worshipful song of the twenty-four elders, one reads: ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created’ (Rev. 4.11).

So the universe is finite and dependent; the universe in its entirety owes its existence to God. This means, among other things, that God is sovereign in creation. God was under no obligation to create the universe. It also means that a clear and absolute ontological distinction must be maintained between God and the created order. Indeed, the Apostle Paul condemns worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. When the crowds in Lystra moved to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods following the healing of a man lame from birth, the apostles immediately pleaded with them to ‘turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them’ (Acts 14.15; cf., Rom. 1.25). Creation is neither a part of God (in His nature or in His being) nor itself intrinsically divine. As Arthur Holmes explains,

[God] is entirely unconstrained, for apart from himself nothing else could even be. Nor does he have any inner compulsion necessitating creation, for he is quite self-sufficient, has no needs, and requires none other for his own satisfaction. He therefore freely chooses whether to create or not, as well as what to create. But God is not capricious. His choice is purposive, not random. In creating at all, and in continuing to act in creation, his good ends are unchangingly the same. His gracious purposes are at work throughout history, manifesting his goodness and glory to and through his creatures.¹

The Christian conception of God and creation, therefore, is to be distinguished from views such as Pantheism and Panentheism. The former, manifest for example in Vedanta Hinduism and Taoism, holds that ‘every existing entity is, only one Being; and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it.’² In identifying the creation with God, Pantheism overtly eliminates the biblical distinction between Creator and creature. Panentheism, which finds expression in classical and neo-Platonism as well as the process theology of the past one hundred years, does not identify the creation (ontologically) with its Creator, but nevertheless affirms that ‘the world is “in” God ontologically.’³ In his famous work On Religion, Friedrich Schleiermacher, having established the centrality of the imagination in comprehending the world, including theological matters, writes that ‘it is our imagination that creates the world for you, and that you can have no God without the world.’⁴ Charles Hartshorne, outspoken in his defense of Panentheism, held that ‘The world…is God’s body, the Soul of which is God.’⁵ Though some ontological separation is maintained between God and the universe, the biblical distinction between Creator and creation is once again blurred. Such reinterpretations of God and the universe are hardly consistent with traditional Christian orthodoxy.

It is evident from the preceding that the Christian doctrine of creation has naturally raised the question of God’s relation to the creation. This was recognized quite

early in the Christian philosophical theological tradition. In the context of his exegesis of Genesis 1.1-3 in his *Confessions* Augustine, for example, begins his consideration of God’s eternality by praying ‘[m]ay I hear and understand how in the beginning you made heaven and earth.’ Augustine goes on to identify God as ‘the originator and creator of all ages’ and ‘the cause of all times,’ claiming ‘You have made time itself. Time could not elapse before you made time.’ If God and the universe are not to be identified, and the universe is not somehow ‘in’ God, then how are they related? Further, the Christian tradition does not hold, as did the Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that God created and then abandoned the universe. Christianity affirms rather that God, having brought the universe into existence, sustains it in being. Thus in investigating God’s relation to the created order, one must take into account both God’s activity of sustaining the universe in existence as well as the nature of the created order itself.

Historically most Christians, seeking to avoid either Pantheism or Panentheism, have concluded God is outside creation. While sustaining the universe in being, participating in human history, and responding to our prayers, God nevertheless exists in some sense beyond creation. Conceiving of time as a part of creation, this has been taken by most Christians to imply that He exists outside time. The majority of Christians have, as Gerald Bray observes, feared that ‘[if God is] within time, an end to God could always be conceived. It was to make this impossible that the concept of extra-temporal eternity imposed itself, in spite of the difficulties it raises.’ Such difficulties arose in the early

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7 *Confessions*, XI.xiii.15.

Church, for example, when it came to explaining how God, existing outside time, could enter time (and space) in His Son Jesus. For this and other reasons I shall discuss below, the view that God is utterly outside time never attained the status of Christian dogma. In other words, though it was long the majority view and is held by some Christian thinkers today, the view of God as existing outside time has never been regarded as a non-negotiable Christian doctrine (such as the Incarnation or the divinity of the Holy Spirit). Still, the question of God’s relation to time highlights the responsibility of Christian theology to connect who God is (in eternity) with what He does (in time) in order to be coherent.

1.2 Establishing Parameters

This thesis is an exercise in Christian philosophical theology. Though the terms are frequently used interchangeably, it is perhaps helpful to conceive of philosophical theology as a branch of the philosophy of religion, where the latter is a discipline that addresses itself philosophically to generic questions related to theistic belief generally and the former is a sub-discipline that addresses itself philosophically to questions involving the tenets of a particular theological tradition (e.g., Christianity or Islam).9 The

9 The early twentieth century’s outlook for the philosophy of religion, especially within the analytic tradition, was inauspicious at best. With deep roots in empiricism, the verificationism and logical positivism in vogue within the Anglophone philosophical community from roughly the 1920s to the 1950s reinforced this outlook. This school of thought asserted the verifiability principle, which stated: ‘the meaning of a proposition consists in the method of its verification, that is in whatever observations or experiences show, whether or not it is true.... But any non-tautological proposition, that is in principle unverifiable by any observation, is ipso facto devoid of meaning’ (Antony Flew, ‘Logical positivism,’ in A Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Antony Flew [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979]).

In the wake of this principle, then, the majority of traditional metaphysical inquiry was regarded as literally meaningless. For example, regarding the mere question of theistic belief, J. J. C. Smart observed, ‘The greatest danger to theism at the present moment does not come from people who deny the validity of the arguments for the existence of God.... The main danger to theism today comes from people who want to say that “God exists” and “God does not exist” are equally absurd’ (‘The Existence of God,’ in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, eds. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre [London: SCM Press, 1955], p. 35; cf. Rudolph Carnap, ‘The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language,’ in Logical
distinction turns not on any difference in philosophical method (indeed, both make free
use of philosophy in general: now metaphysics, now epistemology, now ethics, etc, as
needed), but rather on the question or problem under consideration. As Garrett DeWeese
explains, within Christian philosophical theology ‘the doctrines derived from God’s
special revelation in Scripture are examined, clarified, evaluated, and explained using the

criterion—due in no small part to its self-referential incoherence—in the 1960s, however, the dominance of
logical positivism was broken.

The last quarter century has witnessed a resurgence of interest in traditional metaphysical
questions among philosophers, with the publication of American philosopher Alvin Plantinga’s *God and
Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (1967) being widely recognized as the
tipping point. This metaphysical turn prompted renewed attention to the philosophy of religion, with the
production of a notable body of literature treating, for example, the traditional arguments for God’s
existence, the very concept of God, divine action, and religious experience (e.g., Austin Farrer, *Finite and
Concept of Miracle* [London: Macmillan and Co., 1970], and George Mavrodes, *Belief in God: A Study in
the Epistemology of Religion* [New York: Random House, 1970]). This resurgence also inspired the
founding of at least three professional societies: the Evangelical Philosophical Society in 1974, the
European Society for the Philosophy of Religion in 1976, and the Society for Christian Philosophers in the
USA in 1978), which has amplified this outpouring of work. The vast majority of contemporary
philosophical theologians locate themselves within the analytic tradition of Anglophone philosophy.
Indeed, this prevalence has led to the introduction of the term ‘analytic theology’ to denote ‘the activity of
approaching theological topics with the ambitions of an analytic philosopher and in a style that conforms to
the prescriptions that are distinctive of analytic philosophical discourse. It will also involve…pursuing
those topics in a way that engages the literature that is constitutive of the analytic tradition, employing
some of the technical jargon from that tradition, and so on. But, in the end, it is the style and the ambitions
that are most central’ (Michael Rea, ‘Introduction,’ in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of
Hebblethwaite explores the prospects of philosophical theology for the analytic versus continental
philosophical traditions in his *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell

By the 1980s philosophers of religion, many of whom are openly Christian philosophers, had
begun increasingly to turn their attention to questions directly related to particular Christian doctrines. As
Oliver Crisp observes, ‘[[these philosophers have been encouraged to make this step because of a number
of different factors in addition to the desire to tackle philosophical issues that have a more concrete
application. These include their engagement with philosophers of the past whose work was often as much
theological as philosophical in nature, such as St Augustine of Hippo, St Anselm of Canterbury, St Thomas
Aquinas, or John Duns Scotus. It has also come through a concern with the state of much current theology,
where commitment to things like a robust metaphysical realism has fallen upon hard times and there is a
widespread commitment to some form of hermeneutical universalism, the doctrine according to which all
theory-building is mere interpretation. Behind this claim lies skepticism about the very idea that there is
any such thing as the truth of the matter – or at least, a truth to which human beings have access’ (*Analytic
Theology,’ *The Expository Times* 122 [2011]: 471).
tools of philosophical analysis.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, the philosophical theologian does not seek to subvert the proper goals of theology or dictate a certain research program (i.e., it seeks not to threaten the integrity of theology proper); it seeks, rather, to ‘be a help to the theologian in making sense of the deliverances of theology, given in the testimony of Holy Scripture and the tradition.’\textsuperscript{11} Distinctly Christian philosophical theology, then, seeks to appropriate the tools and resources of philosophical analysis to investigate questions arising within the distinctly Christian theological tradition in order to contribute constructively to that tradition.

Writing from within the Christian philosophical theological tradition, I shall understand talk of God as referring to the necessarily existent, tri-personal Being who is the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, Creator and sustainer of all things. In short, I shall restrict my considerations to the God of classical Christian theism.

Whatever the philosophical theologian says about God’s relation to time must be consistent with Scripture if it is to claim to be Christian. Thus the New and Old Testaments of Scripture play a central role in the Christian philosophical theological enterprise, including the investigation of this thesis. The truth and deliverances of Scripture therefore function as ‘control beliefs’ for the Christian philosophical theologian.\textsuperscript{12} In other words the truth and deliverances of Scripture provide boundaries


\textsuperscript{11} Crisp, ‘Analytic Theology,’ 475. As Brian Hebblethwaite avers, ‘if there are points at which (philosophical theologians) find themselves driven to challenge certain long-standing elements in classical theism, for example, over God’s absolute timelessness, this is usually done in the interests again of constructive and helpful revision’ (\textit{Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine}, p. 12).

\textsuperscript{12} This notion is developed by Nicholas Wolterstorff in his \textit{Reason within the Bounds of Religion}, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984).
within which the philosophical theologian’s theorizing must take place. Thus, I shall assume the truth of the Christian Scriptures. Scripture, however, is neither a philosophical nor a theological textbook, certainly not in the modern sense. In fact, as Thomas Morris observes, ‘[i]t is well known that the classical divine attributes are seriously under-determined by the data of religious experience and biblical revelation.’ Consequently, many of the questions of modern philosophical theologians (such as the metaphysical nature of God’s relation to time) receive no straightforward treatment in Scripture. This is due, no doubt, to the biblical authors having a far different set of priorities. If the biblical authors, either individually or collectively, had a fully worked out understanding of the nature of God’s eternity, it was apparently not their purpose to convey it in their writings. Or, as Paul Helm suggests, they may have simply lacked the ‘reflective context’ for formulating such a doctrine. Regardless, Scripture does tell us, in both the Old and the New Testaments, that God is eternal. The question, then, is whether Scripture gives any clues as to the nature of this eternality. I shall briefly survey some of the relevant biblical data. It is not my purpose to provide a thorough exegetical analysis of these texts (doing so would be well beyond the scope of this thesis). My purpose, rather, is to survey these biblical texts with an eye towards establishing the wide agreement among scholars that Scripture does not explicitly teach any particular view of the metaphysical of God’s eternality.

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14 ‘What matters for the construction of a “view” or “a doctrine” of something as metaphysical as time is not the occurrence of certain words, but the occurrence of reflective contexts in which appropriate concepts are considered…. In the Bible there are no definitions of time….there are no conceptual contrasts there…about time. These considerations provide strong arguments for the modest conclusion that in much if not most of the Bible the contexts do not provide much data from which it is possible to construct a metaphysical view about God’s relation to time’ (Paul Helm, *Eternal God* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], pp. 5-6, cf. pp. 7-11).
‘God,’ Isaiah declares, is ‘the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity’ (Is. 57.15), and when Abraham calls upon the LORD it is as ‘the Eternal God’ (Gen. 21.33).\textsuperscript{15} Isaiah elsewhere records, ‘Who has performed and accomplished it, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last I am He.’ The Psalmist sheds some light on the ancient Hebrew understanding of God’s eternity: ‘Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God…for a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by or as a watch in the night (Ps. 90.2, 4). The phrase ‘from everlasting to everlasting’ is a standard biblical expression, but as Nelson Pike observes, ‘on the surface, at least, this appears to be the claim that the life of God has unending duration both forwards and backwards in time…’\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, the biblical text describes God as existing ‘before’ the creation—seemingly a temporal priority to creation. And again the Psalmist writes: ‘My days are like a lengthened shadow, and I wither away like grass. But You, O Lord, abide forever, and Your name to all generations’ (Ps. 102.11-12). God’s ‘years will not come to an end’ (Ps. 102.27). God’s being eternal means, minimally, then, that God is without beginning or end. He did not begin to exist, nor will He pass out of existence at some point in the future; God exists ‘before’ created time, through created time, and will continue to exist without end. On that much, at least, there is general agreement. It is worth noting that throughout the Old and New Testaments God is portrayed as acting within time: now delivering His people from captivity in Egypt, now

\textsuperscript{15} This ascription is common in Scripture (see also Isaiah 9.6, 26.4 and Jeremiah 10.10), as well as in non-canonical writings (Hermann Sasse, ‘Eternity,’ in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 1, ed. G. Kittel [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964], p. 201. Sasse notes that the ‘eternity’ of God is to be understood as God’s having no beginning or end—‘His eternal being stretches beyond the time of the world…Thus the unending eternity of God and the time of the world, which is limited by its creation and conclusion, are contrasted with one another’).

destroying Gomorrah; now doing this, now doing that. This portrayal lends *prima facie* weight to the temporalist conception of God, but to conclude on that basis alone that temporalism is the biblical picture of God would be premature. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul affirms that ‘He is the eternal King’ (1 Tim. 1.17). Here again, though, the temporal language we encounter is vague. In 1 Corinthians 2.7 Paul refers to ‘the wisdom of God’ which He ‘determined before the ages,’ and Jude 25 similarly speaks of God as worthy of praise ‘before all time and now and forever.’

The clearest New Testament portrayal is given in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the author summarily echoes the Old Testament claims:

> In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end (Heb. 11:10-12).

Such remarks echo the Old Testament claim that God exists (somehow) ‘before’ time began and will never pass out of existence. Beyond that, however, no explanation of the nature of God’s eternality is forthcoming. Thus, as Alan Padgett observes, ‘The Bible knows nothing of a timeless divine eternity in the traditional sense.’

Though both the Old and New Testaments contain numerous references to eternity, it is widely agreed that none points explicitly or conclusively to any *particular* metaphysical conception of God’s relation to time. As James Barr observes in his masterful study of the lexical stock of biblical terms for time, there is a ‘very serious shortage within the Bible of the kind of *actual statements* about “time” or “eternity”’

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17 See also 1 Peter 1.20 and Ephesians 1.4, where God’s choosing and foreknowledge are said to be ‘before the foundation of the world’ and John 1.24, which refers to the Father’s love of Jesus ‘before the creation of the world.’

which could form a sufficient basis for a Christian philosophical-theological view of time. In other words, the testimony of Scripture is inconclusive regarding the nature of God’s eternity. As Paul Helm puts it:

> These verses are consistent with eternalism [i.e., the view that God is utterly beyond time] in that they can fairly be interpreted in an eternalist way. Whether the authors intended…to teach eternalism is a more difficult question, for the statements can equally well be interpreted in a temporalist way. And it is equally difficult to decide if…the writers intended to affirm temporalism.

This has been thoroughly established elsewhere and is generally agreed upon, so there is no need to belabor the point here. As James Barr concludes:

> The position here developed means in effect that if such a thing as a Christian doctrine of time has to be developed, the work of discussing and developing it must belong not to biblical but to philosophical theology.

> In fact we may observe that the origin of the question lies in many ways within philosophical rather than biblical material. [The question], ‘What is the nature of time and eternity in biblical thought?’ is a question for which the Bible itself gives no precedent….If, then, many or most of the modern discussions start out in fact from some problem or difficulty found in modern theological-philosophical discussion, we may regard it as probable that satisfactory results can be reached only by seeking clarification within that area, and not by expecting the Bible to answer the problem for us.

In the absence of anything like ‘the clear biblical view,’ we must agree with Barr that the question of God and time falls to the philosophical theologian.

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19 James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 131. Barr argues that the relevant biblical terms are used in different ways, thus complicating efforts to draw philosophical conclusions about time simply from their etymologies (cf., *Biblical Words for Time*, pp. 22-23).


22 Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, pp. 149-150.
Given their philosophically ambiguous usage in Scripture and their ubiquity in the debate over God’s relation to time, it is important to note that the terms ‘eternal’ and ‘eternity’ are sometimes thought to be synonymous with the terms ‘atemporal’ or ‘timeless.’ The conflation of these terms springs, as we shall see in the next chapter, from Boethius’ classic definition of ‘eternity.’ Whether that definition merits preservation or not, contemporary philosophical theologians use the terms ‘eternal’ and ‘eternity’ in a variety of ways. Our discussion thus far suggests these terms should be understood minimally to mean that God has existed at every point in the temporal past and that He will continue to exist at every point in the temporal future; His existence has neither a beginning nor an end. I shall therefore limit my usage of ‘eternity’ or ‘eternal’ to this basic understanding. The matter before us involves, then, the way in which God exists eternally.

The question of how God relates to time has been much debated, especially since analytic philosophers of religion began turning their attention to it about thirty years ago. Within the Protestant Reformed tradition there have been at least two sides to this debate. On the one hand, temporalists view God as existing ‘within’ time. That is to say, because of His real relation to creation God’s life has, experientially, a past, present, and future. In other words, God experiences the exodus of the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt before He experiences the invasion of Normandy in June of 1944. Thus, for any time, God exists

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23 This seems to be the case with Henry Thiessen, for example, who in his explanation of God’s eternality asserts—with no supporting argumentation—that ‘God is free from all succession of time’ (Lectures in Systematic Theology, rev. by Vernon D. Doerksen [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], p. 79). Louis Berkhof simply defines God’s eternity in terms of atemporalism: ‘We generally think of God’s eternity…as duration infinitely prolonged both backwards and forwards. But this is only a popular and symbolical way of representing that which in reality transcends time and differs from it essentially…. (God’s) eternity may be defined as that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and posses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present’ (Systematic Theology, combined ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], p. 60, emphasis his).
at that time; God exists (literally) now. His existence is both beginningless and endless. Thus God must exist at each moment of time that ever exists. According to temporalists this does not (indeed, cannot) mean that God exists at all moments simultaneously (which suggestion shall be considered below). Rather, periods of God’s life are earlier than and later than other periods of God’s life. Nor does this necessarily mean, though it has sometimes been held, that God has an infinitely long past (i.e., that He has existed through an infinite amount of time prior to the present). Rather, prior to creation God may be said to possess a sort of ‘undifferentiated’ or otherwise non-sequential existence. Temporalism is sometimes pejoratively construed as the view that God is the prisoner of time; that God is somehow helplessly bound by the chains of time; that the ‘cosmic clock ticks inexorably away and God can do nothing about it.’ Looking past their rhetorical effect, it is difficult to see any sense in which such expressions accurately reflect the temporalist position. As we shall see, such expressions have purchase only on the basis of certain neo-Platonist commitments which the temporalist denies.

*Atemporalists*, on the other hand, deny that God has a past, a present, and a future. They espouse the view that God exists ‘outside of’ or ‘beyond’ time, such that His life has no temporal duration whatsoever; they argue, in other words, that God is timeless. He does not experience the exodus before He experiences D-day. On this view God is fully aware of such temporal sequence, but He does not experience any temporal

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24 So Eunsoo Kim asserts that ‘theologically, a…significant problem’ for the temporalist account of divine temporality ‘is that [it] actually confines God Himself by a philosophical concept in saying that God is temporal because He created the temporal world and the tensed theory of time is correct’ (*Time, Eternity, and the Trinity: A Trinitarian Analogical Understanding of Time and Eternity* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010], p. 185).

25 The former sometimes speak of God as ‘everlasting,’ while the latter sometimes speak of God as simply ‘eternal.’ For the sake of clarity, I will use only the temporal(ist)/atemporal(ist) labels.
succession in any sense; God utterly transcends all of creation, including time.

Historically, proponents of divine atemporalism have held that their view is logically implied by certain other doctrines (such as immutability and divine simplicity). Here again God’s existence is regarded as both beginningless and endless, but He does not exist in time. However His actions within creation are explained, God does not stand in what have come to be called, following Thomas Aquinas, ‘real relations’ with creation.26 The atemporalist claim that God stands in no real relations with creation should not be taken to imply that proponents of divine atemporalism are thereby Deists, affirming a God who maintains no involvement or special presence in creation.27 Nor is it meant to imply that God is impersonal. Rather, the notion of a ‘real relation,’ which Aquinas appropriates from Aristotelianism, refers to a relation (i.e., ‘what refers to another’) which ‘exists in the nature of things, as in those things which by their own very nature are ordered to each other, and have a mutual inclination; and such relations are necessarily real relations...’28 In other words, real relations are an ontological matter: real relations obtain in the concrete existence of the relata when the connection is ‘in the very nature of

26 We shall examine Aquinas’ position on God’s relation to time more fully in chapter 2.2.4.
27 As Paul Helm clearly states: ‘It is certainly true that God has relations with something, the universe, with which he would not have had relations had there been no universe’ (‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ in God & Time: Four Views, ed. Greg Ganssle, p. 48).
28 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.28.1, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros, 1947); cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV.15, 1021a 29. It is worth noting that Anselm similarly held that words seeming to imply relations between God and created things in fact do not apply to or express the divine substance: ‘I would be amazed if we could find any noun or verb that we apply to things made from nothing that could be appropriately said of the substance that creates all things…. Therefore, if something is said relatively of the supreme nature, it does not signify his substance. And so it is clear that whatever can be said of him relatively—the fact that he is supreme among all things, or that he is greater than all the things that he made, of anything else like these—does not designate his natural essence’ (Anselm, *Monologion*, 15, in Monologion and Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm, trans. with introduction and notes by Thomas Williams [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996]. The issue of divine relations within Anselm’s theology is helpfully discussed in Brian Leftow, ‘Anselm’s Perfect-Being Theology,’ in The Cambridge Companion to Anselm, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 132-135.
the things themselves.’ But given Aquinas’ belief in the metaphysical simplicity of God’s nature, there cannot, according to Aquinas, exist any accidents in God. Since real relations are a sort of accident, it follows that God can possess no such relation. Aquinas’ point—as he elsewhere makes clear—is that while creatures do stand in real relations to God, God is not really related to creatures: ‘Since, therefore, God is outside the whole order of creation, and all creatures are ordered to Him, and not conversely, it is manifest that creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas in God there is not real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea, inasmuch as creatures are related to Him.’

Brian Leftow, a proponent of atemporalism, helpfully explains:

If God is timeless, God exists, but exists at no time. Thus God bears no temporal relation to any temporal relatum—God does not exist or act earlier than, later than, or at the same time as any such thing. If God is timeless, such truths as ‘God exists’ are timeless truths: though they are true, they are not true at any time.

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30 ‘Every accident is in a subject. But God cannot be a subject, for “no simple form can be a subject,” as Boethius says (De. Trin.). Therefore in God there cannot be any accident…. First, because a subject is compared to its accidents as potentiality to actuality; for a subject is in some sense made actual by its accidents. But there can be no potentiality in God…. Secondly, because God is His own existence; and as Boethius says, although every essence may have something superadded to it, this cannot apply to absolute being…. Thirdly, because what is essential is prior to what is accidental. Whence God is absolute prime being, there can be in Him nothing accidental. Neither can He have any essential accidents… Hence it follows that there is no accident in God’ (*Summa Theologiae*, 1.3.6). Here it must be borne in mind that Aquinas follows Aristotle in conceiving of relation as one of the nine categories of accident (Aristotle, *Categories*, 4.1b25-2a4, in *Aristotle: Introductory Readings*, trans. with introduction and glossary by Terence Irwin and Gail Fine (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996).

31 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.13.7, emphasis added. Though Aquinas denies that God stands in any real relations with creation, he (and those of his ilk) does not thereby mean to deny that God stands in any real relations. Indeed, in articulating the distinction of Persons within the Godhead, Aquinas writes that ‘the Father is denominated only from paternity, and the Son only from filiation. Therefore, if no real paternity of filiation existed in God, it would follow that God is not really Father or Son, but only in our manner of understanding’ (*Summa Theologiae*, 1.28.2). There are, therefore, real relations within the Godhead. For a lucid discussion of God and real relations, see Peter Geach, ‘God’s Relation to the World,’ *Sophia* 8 (1969): 1-9.

On the timeless view, then, it can be said at any time that God exists, but it could not coherently be said at any time that God exists (literally) now.

Thus we see why temporalists and atemporalists alike view their respective positions as mutually exclusive; God cannot be both temporal and atemporal. Indeed, to conceive of God as temporal just is to deny that He is atemporal. Likewise, to conceive of God as atemporal just is to deny that He is temporal. By definition the one amounts to the contradiction of the other, and of course no contradiction can be posited of the divine nature. As Gerald Bray observes, our theological discourse is to be ‘coherent and devoid of internal contradiction, because it derives from the self-revelation of the one true God.’

It is sometimes suggested, however, that just as God is spaceless but can nevertheless act at all points of space (for example, manifesting Himself in the temple as well as manifesting Himself in the wilderness), so can He being timeless nevertheless act at all points of time (i.e., all spatial points as well as all temporal points are equally accessible to God). The analogy suggests that just as God’s spacelessness is not threatened by such action, so we can affirm that God’s timelessness is not threatened by His acting within time. Now the emphasis on both God’s transcendence and immanence is one about which Christians generally agree, but this balance must not be maintained in a contradictory manner. As will become clear in the chapters that follow, the suggested resemblance between God’s spacelessness and eternity misunderstands the analogy between space and time. A spaceless God can indeed act at all points of space because all

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points of space are equally real and are thus equally ‘accessible’ to Him. It is not so with
time. It is not the case (at least according to most modern philosophical theologians) that
all points of time are equally real and thus equally ‘accessible’ as are the points of space.

As Alan Padgett explains, space and time differ in important ways:

God can act on the here-now; God can act on the now at different
places; and God can act on the here at different times. None of this
implies that God can “timelessly” act on the here at all dates “at once.”
This is true of both space and time. As Here-Now exists, so There-
Now exists over there; but it is absurd to say that There-Now exists
here. Likewise, as Here-Now exists, Here-Then existed back then; but
it is absurd to think that Here-Then exists now!34

In other words, God can perform an action now both at Dingwall and at the Eiffel Tower.
Both places exist at the now, and the spatial separation of these real places is no obstacle
for God. Similarly, God can perform an action at the Eiffel Tower at time $t_1$ and then God
can perform another action at the Eiffel Tower at the later time $t_5$. But we cannot
conclude from this that, just as both Dingwall and the Eiffel Tower exist at the now, so
too does the Eiffel Tower now exist at Dingwall, which is to say there is a crucial
disanalogy between space and time. For the same reason we cannot conclude that some
Here-Now (for example, now at the Eiffel Tower) existed at some Here-Then (say, one
hundred twenty three years ago at the Eiffel Tower), even though the Here-Now exists
now, and the Here-Then did exist back then.35

35 Someone may object, however, that the ‘Here-Then’ may well exist ‘Now’ after all. Imagine an astronaut
who travels at high speed from Earth to Pluto and back, discovering upon his return that his clock is behind
the stationary clock of his home base. According to relativity theory (discussed below), by placing
the astronaut’s clock in motion relative to the stationary clock of home base, the moving clock will tick
‘slower’—an effect relativity theorists refer to as ‘time dilation.’ This would seem to controvert the
argument that the ‘Here-Then’ cannot exist Now. This objection is similar to the well-known ‘Twin
Paradox,’ according to which one twin remains on earth while the other twin makes a high-speed trip into
outer space and back. According to relativity theory, upon his return the travelling twin will have lived
The disanalogy between space and time becomes further evident in contrasting the conceptual notions of ‘here’ and ‘now.’ The use of ‘here’ picks out some particular region of space from among other regions of space which might have been designated instead (one might, for example, travel from Dingwall to the Eiffel Tower before making use of ‘here,’ or one may travel instead to New York before making use of ‘here’), whereas the use of ‘now’ does not pick out some moment of time from among other moments of time which might have been designated instead. To see that this is so, consider an object—a gold brick, say. It is obvious that this gold brick cannot at the same time be both here and there, at both Dingwall and the Eiffel Tower, whereas it can be in a given place both now and some other time ‘then.’ Imagine, though, that the gold brick is of such a size that it stretches all the way from Dingwall to the Eiffel Tower, filling all the space in between. In that case it would exist both here and there. Would this not be perfectly analogous to saying of the gold brick that it exists in Dingwall both now and then because it exists in Dingwall now and then as well as all the time in between? It seems not because only a part of the gold brick exists at some time at Dingwall while a

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36 I here follow Richard Gale’s argument (‘Here and Now,’ in Basic Issues in the Philosophy of Time, eds. Eugene Freeman and Wilfrid Sellars [LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1971], pp. 72-85).
different part of the brick exists at the Eiffel Tower. By contrast, to say the gold brick exists at some place now and then is to say that the brick in its entirety exists first at one time and then in its entirety at a later time. In other words, whereas the gold brick does have spatial parts (it can be divided, e.g., into equal spatial slices), it does not have temporal parts. That is to say, objects such as our gold brick cannot be divided into temporal parts, and this is why an object cannot wholly occupy a certain space both now and then.\textsuperscript{37} There is, however, no conceptual difficulty in the gold brick’s being in Dingwall in 1950 and then being in Dingwall in 2012 (viz., by laying unmoved in a bank vault).\textsuperscript{38} The analogy between space and time therefore is simply not an apt one, and so neither is the analogy between God’s spacelessness and timelessness. It is for this reason, as we shall see, that one’s decision regarding the metaphysical nature of time is essential to one’s position on the nature of divine eternality.

So Scripture is inconclusive regarding precisely how God’s eternity is to be conceived. That temporalists and atemporalists offer mutually exclusive conceptions of divine eternity is, as we have seen, evident from their contradictory portrayals of metaphysical reality. A foundational decision in adjudicating this debate, therefore, will involve which of these metaphysical accounts of time is accurate. Indeed, this decision will play a considerable role in the discussions of chapters two and three.


\textsuperscript{38} Gale further explores disanalogies involving actions (e.g., the action of waiting: if I wait thirty minutes for something, my use of ‘now’ designates a different time, regardless of whether I travel during that time or not. The spatial analog to this—waiting through space—is absurd. Cf. Gale, ‘Here’ and ‘Now,’ pp. 84ff and Trenton Merricks, ‘Persistence, Parts and Presentism,’ Noûs 33 [1999]: 421-438).
Though this thesis is concerned only with philosophical issues, the scientific element of the rather complex discussion on the nature of time must be acknowledged. Specifically, because one’s commitments regarding time need to be consistent with one’s commitments regarding the physical nature of the universe, physics and such notion(s) as relativity theory are an often overlooked factor. This factor is all the more important because it has sometimes been suggested that certain modern scientific discoveries have ruled out divine temporalism due to its being incompatible with widely held scientific theory. A comprehensive and thorough analysis of the relevant developments within modern science, which would demand familiarity with the technical and highly specialized field of physics, is beyond the purposes of this thesis (such a treatment would demand an additional thesis on the philosophy of science!). Nevertheless, a general summary of the weighty contributions of Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, arguably the preeminent scientists of all time, is essential.

In 1687 Isaac Newton published his seminal work *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*, in which he presented (among other things) his theory of gravity.

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and gravitational force, his laws of motion, and his discussions of space and time. So influential did the latter become that it can rightly be referred to as the ‘classical concept of time.’ Newton’s *Principia* opens with a section of Definitions, within the *Scholium* to which section Newton distinguishes between absolute time and relative time:

*Absolute*, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration: *relative*, apparent, and common time, is some sensible and external (whether accurate or unequable) measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time; such as an hour, a day, a month, a year.

The idea is that time itself (what Newton refers to as ‘absolute time’) is a quantity that flows independently of any external thing. It possesses, therefore, its own intrinsic metric. By the ‘metric’ of time we mean the absolute value of some interval of time, that is, the means of determining temporal distance. In order to determine length between events and to compare temporal durations, we must appeal to some metric of time. In the absence of some ‘ideal clock,’ Newton explains, we cannot apprehend the metric of absolute time itself. Our best efforts to measure absolute time (reflected by such devices as clocks and calendars), which are only more or less accurate reflections of absolute time, on the other hand, are called ‘relative time’ (often referred to as ‘physical’ or ‘clock’ time). So in the event that one man’s pocket watch reads 11:00 and another man’s pocket watch reads 11:02, the two cannot by synchronizing their watches make it the case that it absolutely

**Footnotes:**


42 *Principia*, vol. 1, p. 6 (emphasis mine).

43 The term ‘relative time’ should not be taken to imply that it actually is such and thus time for one man and another time for another man; Newton is not claiming that time itself is relative from person to person.
is, say, 11:01. Rather, they (generally) live comfortably with their relative approximations of absolute time.

According to Newton not only does absolute time flow regardless of any external object, it exists independently of any external or physical objects. There is an absolute ‘now’ shared by the entire universe. According to Newton, both absolute time and absolute space are grounded in God, constituted respectively by the divine attributes of eternity and omnipresence. In a *General Scholium* which he added to the 1713 edition to his *Principia*, Newton explains: God ‘is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite; he is not duration and space, but he endures and is present. He endures always and is present everywhere, and by existing always and everywhere he constitutes duration and space.’\(^{44}\) The universe’s absolute ‘now’ may be understood as God’s ‘now.’ Thus the mere existence of God constitutes the existence of absolute time (which we may think of as ‘metaphysical time’); indeed, along with space, time ‘is as it were an eminent effect of God…’\(^{45}\) In other words God did not create time, rather, it ‘is a disposition of being qua being’ so that ‘when any being is postulated, space is postulated. And the same may be asserted of duration: for certainly both are dispositions of being or attributes to which we denominate quantitatively the presence and duration of any existing individual thing.’\(^{46}\)

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\(^{44}\) *Principia*, vol. 1, p. 545. On Newton’s view space and time are not themselves attributes of God, but rather are consequences of God’s existence.

\(^{45}\) Isaac Newton, *De gravitatione*, p. 132, quoted in Craig, *God, Time and Eternity*, p. 152.

\(^{46}\) Newton, *De gravitatione*, pp. 136-137, quoted in Craig, *God, Time and Eternity*, p. 152. It is evident, then, that Newton rejected the conception of God as timeless. As James McGuire explains, ‘Newton rejects the view that God’s existence is “all at once,” as expressed by the phrase *totum simul*. That is, he affirms that God’s existence can be characterized by successiveness and the temporality of earlier and later’ (‘Predicates of Pure Existence: Newton on God’s Space and Time,’ in *Philosophical Perspectives on Newtonian Science*, eds. Phillip Bricker and R.I.G. Hughes [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990], p. 92). McGuire also quotes from Newton’s private correspondence: ‘The Schoolmen made a *nunc stans* to be eternity & by consequence an attribute of God & eternal duration hath a better title to that name, though it be but a mode of his existence. For a *nunc stans* is a moment w^\text{th} always is & yet never was nor will be;
One important feature of Newton’s theory of absolute time is its implications for simultaneity. Because absolute time is defined as universal (or, perhaps infelicitously worded, is the single, absolute reference frame), two events may be deemed simultaneous without regard to any relative reference frame.\textsuperscript{47} Since the publication in 1905 of Albert Einstein’s ‘On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,’ however, the Newtonian schema and in particular the concept of absolute time have been widely rejected.\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, in the opinion of Stephen Hawking, Einstein ‘gets rid of absolute time’!\textsuperscript{49}

At the end of the nineteenth century, physicists generally agreed that the propagation of light waves requires the existence of a medium which they referred to as the ‘luminiferous aether.’ On the heels of Newton’s discoveries, this aether was characterized as an absolute reference frame. With his striking new proposal of relativity, however, Einstein dismissed the aether as ‘superfluous inasmuch as the view here to be developed will not require an “absolutely stationary space”.’\textsuperscript{50} With the elimination of an absolute reference frame (i.e., a vantage point from which to observe absolute motion or rest) would come the elimination of absolute time (or ‘God’s time’).

The elimination of absolute time naturally implies the absence of an absolute ‘now’ at which events could be simultaneous\textit{ simpliciter}. This is because, as Einstein

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\textsuperscript{47}Simply put, a reference frame may be understood as a coordinate system that represents some observer.


\textsuperscript{49}Stephen Hawking, \textit{A Brief History of Time} (New York: Bantam, 1988), p. 34.

\textsuperscript{50}Einstein, ‘On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,’ p. 371.
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explains, we must be ‘quite clear as to what we will understand by “time”.’ Time, he explains, is entirely a matter of simultaneity judgments, so our need is for a means of determining whether spatially separated events are simultaneous. Since the speed of light is constant regardless of differing inertial frames, Einstein proposes that we consider two clocks (at rest with respect to one another, that is, sharing an inertial frame) synchronized if ‘the “time” necessary for light to travel from A to B be identical to the “time” necessary to travel from B to A.’ The first clock operator simply notes how long it takes to receive the return light signal from the second clock operator, divides that amount in half, and thus knows what the second clock read upon receiving the initial light signal. Thus the ‘time’ of an event ‘is the reading simultaneous with the event of a clock at rest and located at the position of the event, this clock being synchronous…with a specified clock at rest.’ The clear implication of this definition of time (and the accompanying conception of simultaneity) is that bodies are either in motion or at rest only \textit{with respect to} one another, not \textit{simpliciter}. Given Einstein’s definitions, consider the implications for inertial frames not at rest with respect to one another: imagine, for example, that Clive is aboard an airplane flying from Texas to New York and that Gerald is sitting in his office in Birmingham. Let us say that at the moment Clive flies over Gerald’s office, each of them transmits a light signal to New York. These signals will reach New York together (remember that the speed of light is constant, gaining no velocity due to its being transmitted from a moving source in the way a bullet would if

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\item [51] Einstein, ‘On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,’ p. 371.
\item [52] He illustrates this as follows: ‘If, for instance, I say, “That train arrives here at 7 o’clock,” I mean something like this: “The pointing of the small hand of my watch to 7 and the arrival of the train are simultaneous events”’ (‘On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,’ p. 371).
\item [53] ‘On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,’ p. 372.
\item [54] ‘On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,’ p. 372.
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fired from a moving vehicle). When the signals are reflected back from New York, however, Clive having travelled closer to New York will receive the return signal sooner than Gerald. But given Einstein’s definitions, when Gerald and Clive divide in half the travel time of the light signals, they will reach different conclusions as to how long it took their light signals (which travelled at the same constant speed) to reach New York. This demonstrates, according to Einstein, that there is no physical basis for regarding either Clive or Gerald as in absolute motion or at absolute rest—only at rest or in motion relative to their different inertial frames. According to Einstein, then, since clocks in different inertial frames will measure different times, it follows that events (which are not causally connected) may be simultaneous relative to one inertial frame but not simultaneous relative to another inertial frame. In other words, an event may be future from the perspective of one inertial frame, yet past from the perspective of another. Thus, pace Newton, according to Einstein’s theory, the Special Theory of Relativity, there can be no absolute time, no universal ‘now,’ and no genuine simultaneity.

As is frequently pointed out, Einstein assumes the non-existence of absolute time at the outset of his argument. Notice: the amount of time it takes a light beam to travel from $A$ to $B$ is equal to the amount of time it takes a light beam to travel from $B$ to $A$ only if $A$ and $B$ are not moving together (i.e., if they are at rest relative to one another) through absolute space (an aether). If $A$ and $B$ are in absolute motion together in the aether, then the distance traversed by a light signal transmitted from $A$ to $B$ will be greater than the distance traversed by the light signal reflected back to $A$ from $B$ because both $A$ and $B$ are

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moving. Thus the Newtonian conception of absolute time (and space) is ruled out *a priori* by Einstein. Beyond Einstein’s methodological assumption that there is no empirically unobservable reality such as absolute time, however, we note that in his discussion of absolute time Newton had already conceded the possibility ‘that there is no uniform motion by which time may have an exact measure. All motions can be accelerated and retarded, but the flow of absolute time cannot be changed.’\(^{56}\) Thus Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity shows, at most, that Newton’s shortcoming ‘lay not in his belief in a metaphysical time distinct from physical time…but in his not realizing that the accuracy of physical time in its approximation to metaphysical time depends on the relative motion of one’s clocks.’\(^ {57}\) In short, Einstein’s theory pronounces only on the physical world of relative time, leaving unscathed Newton’s affirmation of absolute time. There are, of course, a number of important contemporary voices in the discussion of the relation between science and religion generally and science and the philosophy of time in particular. Among these are physicist Russell Stannard, who addresses the nature of time and God’s relation to time in his ‘On the Developing Scientific Understanding of Time.’\(^ {58}\) John Polkinghorne, Nancy Murphy, and Robert Russell have each addressed a variety of issues which lie at the intersection of science and religion.\(^ {59}\) Any thoroughgoing treatment

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\(^{56}\) Newton, *Principia*, p. 410.


of their contributions would, of course, constitute the writing of an additional thesis. At any rate, it seems best to conclude with Timothy Sansbury that ‘it appears that at present physics does not provide sufficient resources to argue conclusively for any theory of time… At best, what can be said of the current state of science is that…it suggests a debate between two time theories that are also up for debate in philosophy and theology.’

1.3 God and Time: The Argument

In addition to the temporalist and atemporalist views on God’s relation to time, in recent years another position—a sort of hybrid between the temporalist and atemporalist positions—has been proposed in the work of William Lane Craig (1949 – ). According to this view, which has come to be called ‘accidental temporalism,’ God is timeless sans creation but temporal subsequent to it. In other words God is contingently timeless. Central to accidental temporalism is the claim that God’s temporal status is a contingent and not a necessary property, that is, God’s temporal mode can change. Considered as existing alone without the universe, God is timeless. In such a state of affairs, which traditional Christianity has affirmed, there is no time. According to Craig, time itself came into existence at creation, with God entering into time in virtue of His real relations with the created order. Thus, by His act of creation, God changed from being atemporal to being temporal.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine critically Craig’s accidental temporalism. I shall be concerned particularly with its plausibility and philosophical coherence.

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60 Sansbury, ‘Divine Temporal Transcendence,’ p. 50.
61 This label was suggested by Thomas Senor in his ‘Divine Temporality and Creation Ex Nihilo,’ Faith and Philosophy 10 (1993): 88.
Specifically, I will argue for two claims. First, I will argue that Craig’s accidental temporalism can survive the major philosophical objections that have been raised against it. Second, I will argue that accidental temporalism is not only consistent with but sheds considerable light on key Christian doctrines. I submit that in proposing God is timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation, accidental temporalism as a model of divine eternality is plausible and deserving of serious consideration in the Christian theological community. This thesis will take shape as follows.

The Christian philosophical theologian works, as we have seen, within the confines of God’s special revelation in Scripture. There is a long, rich tradition of philosophical theologians, especially within the medieval church, who have sought, within the biblical confines, to articulate God’s relation to time. If Christian philosophical theology is a long conversation with Scripture, contemporary philosophical theologians are wise to attend to these medieval voices. Before turning to accidental temporalism itself, therefore, this thesis will establish a historical backdrop for the project (chapter two). The bulk of this chapter is a survey of the major contributions of the medieval Christian philosophical theologians, nearly all of whom affirmed the atemporalist view of divine eternality. Beginning with St. Augustine, who offered the first sustained treatment of this doctrine within Christendom, we see the assimilation of certain neo-Platonist tenets—principally metaphysical simplicity/immutability and life ‘at once whole, complete and entirely without succession’—into Christian thought. The atemporalist understanding dominated the tradition from Augustine, through Boethius and Anselm, culminating in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In developing the implications of this understanding for divine foreknowledge, atemporalists (beginning with Boethius)
claimed that all times—past, present, and future—are equally ‘present’ in God’s eternity.

With this development came the implicit affirmation that all times exist on an ontological par (what has come to be called the ‘static’ view of time). Thus God’s knowledge is not actually foreknowledge. However, as attention gradually focused on the metaphysical nature of time, key elements of atemporalism were called into question. Though atemporalism remained the majority view, Duns Scotus rejected the underlying notion that all times are equally present to God, arguing that neither the past nor future exist (what has come to be called the ‘dynamic’ view of time). By the time of Molina, it was widely held that moments of time successively come into existence even for God (the process later called ‘temporal becoming’). Thus the door was opened for temporalist views of God, and by the sixteenth century atemporalism and temporalism were established as competing conceptions of divine eternality.

The contemporary debate has taken shape largely along the lines drawn in the Middle Ages. Contemporary expressions of both atemporalism and temporalism are increasingly nuanced, with defenders from each camp expending great effort to demonstrate their view’s consistency with developments within philosophy, theology, physics, etc. In the latter portion of chapter two I survey the conclusions of three contemporary atemporalist theories, Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, and Paul Helm, and three contemporary temporalists, Richard Swinburne, William Hasker, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Though avoiding the static view of time, contemporary proponents of the temporalist view have often affirmed an infinite past which calls into question God’s status as the Creator of time. As the debate has progressed, it has centered increasingly on the nature of time. Today most Christian
philosophical theologians agree that atemporalism rests upon the static view of time, while the dynamic view of time implies temporalism. It was largely in response to the difficulties raised against the two traditional views that William Lane Craig set about to develop his own view. With this historical context in hand, I shall offer in chapter three an exposition of Craig’s own contribution to the debate over God’s relation to time: accidental temporalism.

In chapter three I offer an exposition of accidental temporalism. The roots of accidental temporalism’s development reach back to Craig’s doctoral research on the medieval Arabic kalām cosmological argument, which implies a beginning of the universe in time. Were this not so, then the past series of temporal events would constitute an actual (versus a merely potential) infinite. It will be argued, however, that attempts to apply the notion of an actual infinite to reality result in absurdities, as illustrated in examples such as the fictional Hilbert’s Hotel (which boasts an actually infinite number of rooms). Therefore, a past beginning of the temporal series of events (i.e., history) entails that time itself had a beginning.

What then is the metaphysical nature of time, and what must be God’s relation to the first moment of time? Building on the realization among the Medieval philosophical theologians that atemporalism and temporalism are concomitant with the static and dynamic views of time (respectively) and because of its centrality in contemporary discussions of God and time, I shall next turn to a philosophical consideration of the metaphysical nature of time itself. This will involve a rather detailed discussion of the metaphysics of time. Employing John McTaggart’s now standard distinction between the A- and B-theories of time, frequently referred to as the dynamic and static views
respectively, I shall survey the reasons for Craig’s affirmation of the dynamic view of
time. So God did not begin to exist, the universe including time did begin to exist at some
point in the finite past, and time is dynamic in nature. If these propositions are to be
coherently affirmed, the question of God’s temporal status *sans* the universe must be
considered.

If time did begin at creation, it seems to follow that *sans* creation there is no time
to which God could be related. Hence, borrowing from atemporalists the notion of a
timeless person, on the accidental temporalist view God is timeless *sans* creation. This
leads to a discussion of God’s relation to the beginning of time as its Creator, as well as
precisely how to conceive of this state of timelessness *sans* creation. Yet even if God
exists timelessly *sans* the temporal universe, the crucial question is whether He remains
timeless or becomes temporal with the creation of the world. Building on the strengths of
the temporalist view, Craig contends that in virtue of His free decision to be really related
to the temporal universe, God entered into time at the moment of creation. This leads to a
thorough consideration of the notion of God’s changing temporal modes from being
timeless to being temporal. Thus the accidental temporalist position: God is timeless *sans*
creation and temporal subsequent to creation.

After providing the conceptual context for and exposition of accidental
temporalism, I shall evaluate, on their own terms, several purely analytical philosophical
objections which have been raised against it (chapter four). These include the ‘disturbed
timelessness objection’ and the ‘before-after incoherence objection.’ The former takes the
shape of a dilemma: either God’s timeless phase does not cease (in which case God
would seem to be both timeless and temporal subsequent to creation, which is a
contradiction), or if it does then there can be no state of affairs God is timeless sans creation (because a timeless state is characterized as by perfect immobility). The latter objects that accidental temporalism boils down to the claim that God’s timeless phase is in time, which is unintelligible (because if something is within time then it cannot be timeless). In response to each of these objections I shall further the current scholarship on divine eternity by offering original answers to these objections, arguing in each instance that the objections are flawed. I shall also suggest and consider original objections to accidental temporalism, including the unwelcome possibility that despite being internally coherent, accidental temporalism may threaten divine omniscience. I shall also suggest and consider a dilemma which threatens accidental temporalism’s dependence on the dynamic theory of time. I shall ultimately contend that accidental temporalism can survive the major philosophical objections which have been raised against it. Accidental temporalism, I shall argue, is both internally consistent and congruous with the central tenets of Christianity (divine omniscience in particular).

In chapter five I shall assume the plausibility of the accidental temporalist conception of God’s relation to time as explicated and defended in chapters three and four. Proceeding on that assumption, I shall further advance the discussion by arguing that accidental temporalism is not only internally consistent but possesses tremendous explanatory power and scope. In order to show this, I consider accidental temporalism’s implications for familiar theological problems as well as challenges to the coherence of Christian theology. I take as test cases of the former the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, the pre-existence of Christ, and the question of subordination within the Trinity, while an atheistic objection to God’s existence based on divine eternality serves as a test case of
the latter. It will be argued that in each case, while avoiding difficulties that plague the purely atemporalist and purely temporalist positions, accidental temporalism furnishes a coherent and plausible solution to familiar doctrinal difficulties, thus exhibiting impressive explanatory power and scope.

Chapter six will conclude the thesis by offering a summary of the overall argument and drawing a few modest conclusions for the God and time discussion. I will also point out some possibilities for future research emerging from this project.

Whether due to its relative freshness or its extraordinary level of philosophical and theological sophistication, Craig’s view has not received adequate consideration in the professional literature. This thesis will attempt to persuade the reader that accidental temporalism has sufficient merits to commend itself as a viable model for conceiving of God’s relation to time.\footnote{Perhaps it would be helpful to mention as well what this thesis is not. This thesis is not an open inquiry into God’s relation to time, considering evenly the various competing views and evaluating the supporting arguments for each. Doing so would be a colossal undertaking, in excess of 800 or 900 pages—indeed, worthy of several additional theses. Given that there is a rapidly growing literature on the subject, which contains increasingly nuanced versions of both traditional as well as newer hybrid views (such as Craig’s). To provide even a sweeping survey of all the views would be an overwhelming task.}
CHAPTER 2:

Historical Context of Accidental Temporalism

2.1 Introduction: Historical Context of Accidental Temporalism

We have seen that, though both the Old and New Testaments contain numerous references to eternity, the testimony of Scripture is inconclusive regarding the nature of God’s eternality. Christian thinkers of the philosophical theological tradition, at least as early as St. Augustine, have wrestled with how to conceive of God’s relation to time. Thus most of the challenges and questions in the contemporary debate over God and time are not new. My purpose in this chapter is to trace the development within Christian theology of the two major views of God’s relationship to time: atemporalism and temporalism. My concern is not so much to present a comprehensive study of these developments, but rather to emphasize those elements that influence and reappear in the contemporary God and time literature—particularly that of William Lane Craig.

The non-Christian theistic philosophers who preceded the Christian philosophical theological tradition established the precedent of ascribing to God timeless existence. Though this description had long been applied to the Platonic Forms, the neo-Platonist philosopher Plutarch (45 – 120) appears to make the earliest such ascription to God:

God…exists for no fixed time, but for the everlasting ages which are immovable, timeless…in which there is not earlier nor later, no future nor past….He…has with only one “Now” completely filled “For ever”…and only when Being is after His pattern is it in reality Being, not having begun nor about to be, nor has it had a beginning nor is it destined to come to an end.¹

This understanding gradually became accepted into Christian thought, especially through the influence of Alexandrian theology. The Alexandrian Origen (185 – 254), who is sometimes called the first Christian systematic theologian, sought to blend neo-Platonist and Christian thought. In his *On First Principles*, Origen claims that ‘the statements we make about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit must be understood as transcending all time and all ages and all eternity.’ As he later elaborates, ‘Now this expression which we employ—“that there never was a time when He did not exist”—is to be understood with an allowance. For these very words “when” or “never” have a meaning that relates to time, whereas the statements made regarding Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to be understood as transcending all time, all ages, and all eternity.’ Yet though the neo-Platonist notion of divine timeless existence had been introduced into Christian thought prior to Augustine, it was Augustine who offered the first sustained treatment of this doctrine within Christendom; it was Augustine who set the tone for the Christian philosophical theological tradition’s consideration of God’s relation to time. Though the focus of this thesis is not historical, it may prove helpful to survey the most influential responses within this tradition. Given his preeminence within the tradition I begin with Augustine. Nearly all of the major medieval Christian philosophical

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4 *On First Principles*, 4.1.28. Origen goes on to maintain that God cannot be understood in temporal terms, whereas all that is not God (i.e., the created order) must be understood in terms of temporality. For further discussion of the influence of Plotinus upon Origen, see Tadros Y. Malaty, *The School of Alexandria, book two: Origen* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1995), pp. 325-330.
theologians held that God exists atemporally. This appears to be largely a result of the influence of neo-Platonism. Despite this near consensus, there was less agreement among the Medievals regarding the nature of time. Nevertheless, the dominant positions on God’s relation to time were well established by the Medievals, and it is the influence of their work we find championed by contemporary philosophical theologians working on the issue. Thus I round out this chapter with a consideration of three contemporary atemporalist positions: those of Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, and Paul Helm, as well as three contemporary temporalist positions: those of Richard Swinburne, William Hasker, and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

Before turning to a presentation and analysis of Craig’s own view, I shall provide an historical sketch of the major historical contributions to the God and time discussion. Doing so will establish in historical perspective a helpful theological and philosophical framework for my project.

2.2 Medieval Accounts of Divine Eternality

Contemporary philosophers of religion and philosophical theologians have scrutinized practically every conceivable aspect of the divine nature, including God’s relation to time. Their work, however, has not been done in an intellectual vacuum. As William Hasker has observed, ‘all of the major alternative positions’ to this question were delineated by about the end of the sixteenth century, even though ‘the insights and techniques of contemporary analytic philosophy offer the opportunity for genuine and important gains’ in our understanding of the issues involved.\(^5\) It will be helpful, then,

\(^5\) William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 1-2. Though a precise definition of ‘analytic philosophy’ is notoriously difficult to achieve, it may be considered less a school of philosophical thought than a school of philosophical methodology or technique.
before explaining and defending Craig’s view, to survey the historical backdrop of his project. My aim here is not to explicate or critique these positions in an exhaustive way. Rather, my purpose is to describe what has been said about them in a way that provides some context for Craig’s contribution. It is worth noting that neither the nature of time nor God’s relation to time were presenting issues for the Medievals. Certainly they reflected on and developed (sometimes rather sophisticated) positions on time and God’s relation to time, but their focus was elsewhere. Rather, we are frequently left to infer their positions on these matters from related discussions, usually God’s infallible knowledge of future contingents. Summarizing the contributions of every medieval position would be excessive, so I shall restrict the discussion to the positions held by several of the major Medievals, nearly all of whom affirmed God’s pure atemporality.

2.2.1 Augustine

Augustine (354 – 430) was the first Christian thinker to offer a significant treatment of the question of time. More than any other figure, he represents the culmination of ancient Christian thought and the beginning of the transition to what we now call the medieval era. His indebtedness to the neo-Platonist tradition (*Confessions* VIII.5; *City of God* VIII.8, 12; IX.10), and in particular Plotinus, is well documented, and it is largely for his elucidation of orthodox Christian doctrine in these lights that Augustine is celebrated. Augustine’s influence on subsequent Christian philosophical
theologians can hardly be exaggerated, with most of his successors building on his foundational work. For this reason I shall devote the majority of the space to Augustine’s views. It is within the context of reflecting on the doctrine of creation that Augustine treats God’s relationship to time—a treatment which shaped much subsequent medieval inquiry.

Augustine, in his most thorough treatment of divine eternality, the eleventh book of the Confessions, is emphatic that God is the Creator of time: ‘There was therefore no time when you had not made something, because you made time itself. No times are coeternal with you since you are permanent. If they were permanent, they would not be times.’ Augustine unequivocally identifies God as ‘the originator and creator of all ages’ and ‘the cause of all times,’ claiming ‘You have made time itself. Time could not elapse before you made time.’ These remarks reveal Augustine’s commitment to a robust doctrine of creation ex nihilo, according to which both time and space themselves are brought into being by God.

The way, God, in which you made heaven and earth was not that you made them either in heaven or on earth. Nor was it in the air or in water, for these belong to heaven and earth. Nor did you make the universe within the framework of the universe. There was nowhere for it to be made before it was brought into existence.


9 Conf., XI.5.7.
This commitment is later reaffirmed in *The City of God*: ‘Since then, God…is Creator and ordainer of time, I do not see how He can be said to have created the world after spaces of time had elapsed, unless it be said that prior to the world there was some creature by whose movement time could pass.’\(^{10}\) If, however, there had existed times before creation when God had not yet decided to create, then God does not ‘remain the same forever’ and divine immutability is compromised.\(^{11}\) God exists, therefore, prior to time (though this must be understood as metaphysical, not temporal priority), in eternity. And God’s existence, being eternal, ‘cannot truly be called eternal if it is destined to have an end.’\(^{12}\)

Undoubtedly formative to his position on God’s relation to time is Augustine’s assimilation of neo-Platonist thought. Augustine held that each of God’s attributes is identical to the divine essence, that is, that God’s nature is metaphysically simple. In a prominent display of his neo-Platonist colors, he writes:

> But God is truly called in manifold ways, great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatsoever other thing seems to be said of Him not unworthily: but His greatness is the same as His wisdom; for He is not great by bulk, but by power; and his goodness is the same as wisdom and greatness, and His truth is the same as all those things; and in Him it is not one thing to be blessed, and another to be great, or wise, or true, or good, or in a word to be Himself.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{10}\) *The City of God*, XI.6. It is interesting to note that Augustine included the creation of the angels in the divine activities of the first day (‘[S]urely no one would be rash enough to hold that the angels were created after all the other things mentioned in the six days of creation…There is, then, no doubt that, if the angels are included in the works of God during these six days, they are that light which was called day...’ [*The City of God*, XI.9]), even allowing that the angels may exist (in some mysterious sense) within time (cf. *The City of God*, XII.16).

\(^{11}\) *The City of God*, XI.10.12.

\(^{12}\) *The City of God*, XI.11.

Augustine’s conception of ‘change’ as the loss and acquisition of being meant he could not admit any change in God.  

This doctrine is motivated by the neo-Platonist belief, tracing back at least to Parmenides, that any change (indeed, even the possibility of change) entails a lesser degree of being: ‘that which is changed does not retain its own being; and that which can be changed, although it be not actually changed, is able not to be that which it had been; and that hence that which not only is not changed, but also cannot at all be changed, alone falls most truly…under the category of BEING.’

A perfect being, then, cannot admit of such composition. Thus, ‘He [God] truly is because He is unchangeable.’ The correlative of this principle is that God, who truly is, must be immutable. In seeking to preserve God’s pure—indeed, purest—immutability, Augustine posits God’s metaphysical simplicity. Augustine seems to have taken this metaphysical simplicity as axiomatic in his theology:

That nature is called simple which does not possess anything that it can lose and for which the possessor and what it possesses are not

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14 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V.2.3 and VII.5.10; cf. *The City of God*, XI.6, where change is the distinguishing mark between time and eternity: ‘eternity and time are rightly distinguished by this, that time does not exist without some movement and transition, while in eternity there is no change.’

15 Presocratic thought about time grew directly out of their contemplation of change. The earliest sustained treatments of time occur in the Presocratics Heraclitus (540 BCE) and Parmenides (515 BCE). Each was attempting to account for the occurrence of change within reality. Heraclitus held that all things are in constant flux within time, which itself had no beginning. Parmenides, on the other hand, denied the possibility of change (and by consequence of time), affirming rather that only that which is permanent is real. Regarding Heraclitus’ view of time, see Giannis Stamatellos, *Plotinus and the Presocratics: A Philosophical Study of Presocratic Influences in Plotinus’ Enneads* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 114-117 and Heraclitus, Fragments 10.118 (52) and 10.77 (30), in *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*, 2d ed., ed Richard D. McKirahan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011). For further discussion of Parmenides’ view of time, see Phillip Turetzky, *Time* (New York: Routledge Press, 1998), pp. 9-11; McKiraham, pp. 60f; and *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2d ed., eds. G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 249-251.


distinct in the way a vessel and the liquid it contains, a body and its color, the air and its light or heat, or a soul and its wisdom are.\textsuperscript{18}

One implication of a purely simple nature is the absence of any temporal movement or parts. Indeed, Augustine’s commitment to simplicity appears to have provided sharp constraints on his understanding of God’s relation to time. The commitments that God brought time into existence and is a metaphysically simple nature seem to have led Augustine directly to the conclusion that God must therefore exist outside of or beyond time. Augustine explains:

It is not in time that you precede times. Otherwise you would not precede all times. In the sublimity of an eternity which is always in the present, you are before all things past and transcend all things future, because they are still to come, and when they have come they are past. ‘But you are the same and your years do not fail’ (Ps. 101:28). Your ‘years’ are ‘one day’ (Ps. 89:4; 2 Pet. 3:8), and your ‘day’ is not any and every day but Today, because your Today does not yield a tomorrow, nor did it follow on a yesterday. Your Today is eternity.\textsuperscript{19}

Having thus identified God as the timeless Creator of time, Augustine rhetorically asks:

What is time? Who can explain this easily and briefly? … We surely know what we mean when we speak of it. We also know what is meant when we hear someone else talking about it. What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know.\textsuperscript{20}

Nonetheless, Augustine goes on to describe time (perhaps more appropriately termed ‘temporality’) as a mode of existence in contrast to the mode of eternity (perhaps more appropriately termed ‘eternality’). Time pertains only to that which is created (i.e., to that


\textsuperscript{19} Conf., XI.13.16.

\textsuperscript{20} Conf., XI.14.17.
which is not eternal). He compares the temporal existence of humanity, for example, to the eternal existence of God:

In the sublimity of an eternity which is always in the present, you are before all things past and transcend all things future, because they are still to come, and when they have come they are past…. Ours come and go so that all may come in succession.\(^\text{21}\)

Whereas time is changing and fleeting, eternity is constant. According to Augustine, eternity is ‘where nothing is transient, but the whole is present. But no time is wholly present.’\(^\text{22}\) He here borrows from Plotinus, who writes:

\[\text{Thus we know Identity, a concept or, rather, a Life never varying, not becoming what previously it was not, the thing immutably itself, broken by no interval; and knowing this, we know Eternity. … We know it as a Life changelessly motionless…not this now and now that other, but always all; not existing now in one mode and now in another, but a consummation without point or interval.}\(^\text{23}\)

Thus eternity is, according to Plotinus:

the life that is forever unchanging and possesses all its reality in the present. There is no succession involved in this life, since nothing is passed and nothing is to come, but whatever it is it is always…. Thus we find that eternity is the life of being in its very being, at once whole, complete and entirely without succession.\(^\text{24}\)

In characterizing time, Augustine draws a sharp ontological distinction between the past and the future on one hand and the present on the other. He writes, ‘take

\(^{21}\) Conf., XI.13.16.

\(^{22}\) Conf., XI.11.13.


\(^{24}\) *The Enneads*, III.7.3. For a consideration of how the concepts of time and eternity developed in late neo-Platonism, see *The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism: Texts with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Jerusalem, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1971).
the…past and future. How can they “be” when the past is not now present and the future is not yet present?\textsuperscript{25} Thus only the present exists. But what is ‘the present’? Any interval of time—a week, for example—can be divided into past, present, and future. To speak of ‘the present week,’ then, is imprecise because some days have passed away and some remain yet future; only this present day is really the present. This process can be repeated for hours, minutes, and seconds until ‘some bit of time which cannot be divided into even the smallest instantaneous moments’ is reached, and this, claims Augustine, is what we intend by ‘the present.’\textsuperscript{26}

Augustine anticipates an interesting difficulty that the non-existence of the past and future presents for our knowledge of the past and (as in the case of prophecy) the future: ‘For what does not exist cannot be seen. And those who tell of the things past could not speak of them as if they were true, if they did not see them in their minds.’\textsuperscript{27} After considering and rejecting the possibility that the past and future do exist in ‘some secret place,’ he concludes that talk of the past is not talk of ‘the things themselves’ but of memories.\textsuperscript{28} Likewise, in the ‘foreknowing’ of future events, ‘it is not the events themselves [that are seen], for they do not exist as yet.’\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps, he suggests, we really ‘foresee’ the ‘causes and signs’ of future events which are present. But given that ‘what

\textsuperscript{25} Conf., XI.14.17.


\textsuperscript{27} Conf., XI.17.22.

\textsuperscript{28} Although he says elsewhere: ‘But then, how did (God) promise; for the promise was made to men, and yet they had no existence before eternal times? Does this not mean that, in His own eternity, and in His coeternal world, that which was to be in its own time was already predestined and fixed?’ (The City of God, XII.16). While this could be read as granting to temporal things ontological status in eternity, such a reading is neither demanded nor in keeping with Augustine’s clearer statements elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{29} Conf., XI.18.24.
does not exist certainly cannot be taught,’ how does God teach the prophets?\footnote{Conf., XI.19.25.} Clearly this understanding of divine eternity has implications for God’s knowledge:

It is not as if the knowledge of God were of various kinds, knowing in different ways things which as yet are not, things which are, and things which have been. For not in our fashion does He look forward to what is future, nor at what is present, nor back upon what is past; but in a manner quite different and far and profoundly remote from our way of thinking. For He does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness; so that of those things which emerge in time, the future, indeed, are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence.\footnote{The City of God, XI.21.}

Augustine does not fully resolve the conundrum of how the timeless God knows ‘what does not exist,’ confessing that ‘this way of thine is too far from my sight; it is too great for me, I cannot attain to it.’\footnote{Conf., XI.19.25.}

The Augustinian position, then, is that God exists in a purely timeless eternity, which may be called an ‘eternal present.’ Eternity is characterized by unchangeableness, whereas time is characterized as changing and ephemeral. There is an ontological distinction between the past, which was real, and the future, which (presumably) will be real. These are separated by the only real time: the present. In His eternal present, God, who is metaphysically simple, sees all times and events simultaneously.

\subsection{2.2.2 Boethius}

If Augustine is credited with bequeathing Neo-Platonism, then the Roman senator and philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480 – 525) is responsible for transmitting Aristotle’s entire \textit{Organon} in Latin, though he also translated and composed
several commentaries on Neo-Platonist works. In the context of attempting to reconcile
God’s foreknowledge and human freedom, Boethius aligned himself with Augustine;
Boethius agrees that God is utterly timeless. It was Boethius, however, who first appealed
to the doctrine of divine timeless eternality as a solution to the theological puzzle of
foreknowledge. As was the case with Augustine, Boethius’ work is infused with Neo-
Platonist thought.

Boethius’ definition of eternity in *The Consolation of Philosophy* quickly became
the *locus classicus* of the atemporalist tradition. ‘Eternity,’ he mused,

is the whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life. The
meaning of this can be made clearer by comparison with temporal beings. For whatever lives in time lives in the present, proceeding
from past to future, and nothing is so constituted in time that it can
embrace the whole span of its life at once. It has not yet arrived at
tomorrow, and it has already lost yesterday; even the life of this day is
lived only in each moving, passing moment. Therefore, whatever is
subject to the condition of time, even that which…has no beginning
and will have no end in a life coextensive with the infinity of time, is
such that it cannot rightly be thought eternal. For it does not
comprehend and include the whole of infinite life all at once, since it
does not embrace the future which is yet to come. Therefore, only that
which comprehends and possesses the whole plenitude of endless life
together, from which no future thing or any past thing is absent, can
justly be called eternal. Moreover, it is necessary that such a being be
in full possession of itself, always present to itself, and hold the
infinity of moving time present before itself.

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33. Boethius achieved the esteemed office of *magister officiorum* in the court of the Germanic Ostrogoth
king Theodoric. Tragically, he was soon after falsely accused of treason and condemned to execution.
While imprisoned, Boethius composed his most famous work: a prosimetrum entitled *The Consolation of
Philosophy*. For a recounting of this story see H. Liebeschütz, ‘Boethius and the Legacy of Antiquity,’ in
*The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

34. The influence of neo-Platonism on Boethius is explored in Eleonore Stump, *Boethius’s In Ciceronis
Topica*, trans. with notes and intro. by Eleonore Stump (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 1-
2; Christopher Erismann, ‘The Medieval Fortunes of the *Opuscula sacra*,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to
Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 163; John Marenbon,

1962), Book V, prose 6. All references to this edition.
The claim here is that God’s eternality consists in His ‘simultaneous possession of endless [or illimitable] life.’ This is, again, remarkably similar to Plotinus, who characterized eternity as ‘a life limitless in the full sense of being all the life there is and a life which, knowing nothing of past or future to shatter its completeness, possesses itself intact for ever.’ Temporal things, by contrast, experience lives that are within time; they do not live all of their lives at once. As Boethius explains in *De Trinitate*: ‘our now, as if running along, makes time and sempiternity; the divine now, permanent, not moving and standing still, makes eternity.’

As with Augustine, Boethius’ view of God’s eternality was strongly influenced by his Neo-Platonism. One hears, for example, the distinct echoes of Augustine, with whom Boethius explicitly shared an acceptance of divine simplicity:

For God is not one thing because He is, and another thing because He is just; with Him to be just and to be God are one and the same. So when we say, ‘He is great or the greatest,’ we seem to predicate quantity, but it is a quantity similar to this substance which we have declared to be supersubstantial; for with Him to be great and to be God are all one…. God is simply and entirely God, for He is nothing else than what He is, and therefore is, through simple existence, God. Again we apply just, a quality, as though it were that of which it is predicated; that is, if we say ‘a just man or just God,’ we assert that man or God is just. But there is a difference, for man is one thing, and a just man is another thing. But God is justice itself. So a man or God is said to be great, and it would appear that man is substantially great or that God is substantially great. But man is merely great; God is greatness.

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36 Plotinus, *The Enneads*, III.7.5.
Thus unlike temporal beings, for whom time proceeds from past to future, God does not experience temporal succession or change; He exists ‘in the eternal present,’ comprehending all times past and future as ‘immediately present.’

Indeed, as Boethius states, ‘no future thing or any past thing is absent’ from God. Though it appears he never fully developed this concept, Boethius does offer two suggestive metaphors: first, an eternal God is like the center point of a circle, equally related to all outer points of the circle. The idea is that from His position in a privileged eternity, God is really related to all moments of time—past and future. Second, he likewise compares God’s foreknowledge of temporal reality to the vision of things from atop a summit. Here time is likened to space, with the same implication: from His vantage point in eternity, all moments of time are laid out before God.

From his discussion of God’s foreknowledge of future contingent events we are able to glean something of how Boethius conceives the nature of time. That such events are regarded as genuinely contingent and thus not definitely true or false is apparent:

if every affirmation is definitely true or false, negation will count out in the same way, so that everything happens by an inevitable reason of necessity; and if this is so, free choice perishes. But this is impossible; therefore it is not true that every affirmation or negation is definitely true or false.

Given that future contingents lack a definite truth value (i.e., are not now true or false), the event may fail to occur. Whereas past and present events correspond to actual reality, future contingent ones do not. This implies an ontological distinction between the future

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39 *Consolation of Philosophy*, V.6. Here Boethius is plainly indebted to Augustine.

40 *Consolation of Philosophy*, IV.6.

and the present. However, these remarks seem to reveal some conflict in Boethius’ understanding of time and eternity. In likening God’s eternity to the center point of a circle whose circumference constitutes time (as well as portraying divine foreknowledge as vision of temporal reality from atop a summit), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the points of time are equally existent in reality.

As Garrett DeWeese has noted, though Boethius’ conception of eternity is revered, ‘the celebrity of the definition does not mean it is either clear or correct.’ On a straightforward reading, there appears to be tension in the Augustinian/Boethian claim that God ‘simultaneously possesses’ an ‘endless life.’ ‘Endless life’ seems strongly to imply temporal duration or extension of some sort, while ‘simultaneous, whole/complete possession’ seems to entail a non-extended or durationless moment. Yet Boethius knows from Augustine that God’s ‘eternal present’ is ‘an interval with no duration.’ Moreover, as the noted scholar of medieval philosophy Katherin Rogers observes, Augustine employs the notion of ‘the present’ precisely because any duration would limit the divine simplicity.

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43 Robert Cook deems Boethius’ definition of eternity ‘suspect, for it suggests that God has both infinite duration (“unending life”) and also no duration (“all at once”)’ (‘God, Time and Freedom,’ *Religious Studies* 23 [1987]: 81).

44 There are several recent attempts to alleviate the tension in Boethius’ claims. Two deserve mention. Brian Leftow claims that Boethius is best read as ascribing to God ‘atemporal duration’ by which he means extension in tenseless—i.e., B-theory—time. On this proposal God’s life ‘involves earlier and later, yet none of it ‘passes away’ or is ‘yet to come’ (*Time and Eternity*, p. 120). Elsewhere Stump and Kretzmann, noting that Boethius’ view demands ‘duration of a special sort,’ argue for ‘duration none of which is not—none of which is absent…or flowed away.’ Thus, in the absence of any earlier or later, the events of God’s life ‘cannot be ordered sequentially from the standpoint of eternity,’ in the sense that eternity contains no distinct points in any sense (*Eternity,* pp. 433-434). Both proposals, however, seem unable to adequately account for Boethius’ claims that God’s life in eternity lacks any temporal extension whatsoever.

45 Augustine, *Conf.*, XI.15.20.

Regardless of the above concerns, it is evident that the neo-Platonist understanding of God as metaphysically simple continued with Boethius, as did the tradition of understanding God as existing purely atemporally, whether that is understood in terms of a purely durationless existence or as successionless duration. This line of reasoning continued unbroken directly to Anselm.

2.2.3 Anselm of Canterbury

Writing more than 500 years after Boethius, Anselm of Canterbury (1033 – 1109) was unmistakably working with an Augustinian perspective on God’s relation to time specifically and on neo-Platonism generally. Though he never quoted explicitly from Augustine’s corpus, Anselm’s indebtedness to Augustine is universally acknowledged. His ‘own Platonism was always dependent on Augustine’s completion of the long process by which the [Platonic] theory of ideas was adapted to monotheistic doctrine.’ Moreover, ‘the learned tradition in the Boethian corpus, the passages commenting on Porphyry and the observations which explain Aristotle’s *Categories* as verbal terms, were certainly well known to Anselm.’ It is not surprising, then, as Brian Leftow, a

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48 Gareth Matthews opines that ‘[t]he influence of St. Augustine on St. Anselm…is difficult to overestimate’ (‘Introduction,’ in *Augustine: On the Trinity*, ed. Gareth Matthews [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], p. xxvii). Étienne Gilson agrees: ‘As [Anselm] repeatedly said, his only ambition was to restate what his master Augustine had already stated. And this is exactly what he did. Moreover, Anselm was so fully convinced of the validity of Augustine’s method that its most perfect definitions are to be looked for in the writings of Anselm rather than in those of Augustine’ (*Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* [New York: Scribners, 1938], pp. 23-24). See also Giles E.M. Gasper, ‘Anselm and his Sources,’ in *Anselm of Canterbury and his Theological Inheritance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 5-42.


prominent contemporary Anselmian, notes, that Anselm’s atemporality ‘explicitly derives…from God’s simplicity and role as the creator of time.’\textsuperscript{51}

We have already seen the neo-Platonist belief that ‘only that which not only is not changed, but also is even unable to be changed in any way, is most truly said to be.’\textsuperscript{52} In his \textit{Proslogion} Anselm writes that ‘You [God] alone, then, of all things most truly exist and therefore of all things possess existence to the highest degree; for anything else does not exist as truly, and so possesses existence to a lesser degree.’\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, ‘whatever is made up of parts is not absolutely one, but in a sense many and other than itself, and it can be broken up either actually or by the mind.’\textsuperscript{54} Anselm thus agreed with Augustine and Boethius that God’s nature is metaphysically simple:

Therefore there are no parts in You, Lord; neither are You many, but You are so much one and the same with Yourself that in nothing are You dissimilar with Yourself. Indeed You are unity itself not divisible by any mind. Life and wisdom and the other [attributes], then, are not parts of You, but all are one and each one of them is wholly what You are and what all others are.\textsuperscript{55}

With his predecessors Anselm took this to entail God’s existing completely beyond time since, again, location in time would involve God’s being at different times (i.e., disunity in being). To exist \textit{at} (or to be \textit{contained by}) any particular time(s) would be to ‘cut [the divine essence] up into parts along the divisions of time.’\textsuperscript{56} Echoing Boethius’s definition of eternity—that ‘eternity is life unending, simultaneous, whole, and perfectly

\textsuperscript{51} Leftow, \textit{Time and Eternity}, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{52} Augustine, \textit{De Trin.}, V.2.3.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Prosl.}, 18.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Prosl.}, 18. Anselm makes a similar argument in \textit{Monologion} 16-17.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Monologion}, 21.
existing\textsuperscript{57}—Anselm thus held that God does not exist at any time, but rather exists beyond time:

[I]s there nothing past in Your eternity, so that it is now no longer; nor anything future, as though it were not already? You were not, therefore, yesterday, nor will You be tomorrow, but yesterday and today and tomorrow You are. Indeed You exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside all time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow are completely in time; however, You, though nothing can be without You, are nevertheless not in place or time but all things are in You. For nothing contains You, but You contain all things.\textsuperscript{58}

It is clear that Anselm agrees with Augustine and Boethius that God exists in a changeless, ‘eternal present.’ This eternal present ‘is not the temporal present…but is an eternal present in which the whole of time is contained…. [therein] the whole of time is encompassed at once, as well as whatever occurs at any time.’\textsuperscript{59} Anselm’s own contribution to this tradition is his attempt to explain precisely how God can lack any temporal parts and be utterly beyond time and yet ‘exist as a whole in individual places and times…without its life span (which is nothing other than true eternity) being divided into past, present, and future.’\textsuperscript{60}

Anselm’s discussion of the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom affords us an insight into his conception of time. Whereas in Boethius the co-existence of all times in reality was merely hinted at, this view becomes overt in Anselm. According to the latter, all times (and so all events) are equally present to God in eternity:

\textsuperscript{57} Monologion, 24.

\textsuperscript{58} Prosl., 19. Cf. Plato, Timaeus, 37.


\textsuperscript{60} Monologion, 22.
'And thus you are always beyond (ultra) [these “eternal” creatures], since you are always present “there,” or rather since it is always present to you, which for them has not yet arrived.’61 If the events of 2031 are yet future to me, they are nevertheless present and thus real to God. Thus the events of 2011 and 2031 (as well as all other times) are equally real—they exist on an ontological par. Indeed, Anselm is explicit on this score in his Concordia:

Just as something in eternity neither was nor will be but just is, and nevertheless it was or will be in time without any contradiction, in the same way that which cannot change in eternity, in time at some temporal point before it happened, is shown to be changeable through free will without any inconsistency. However, although nothing is there [in eternity] but what is present, it is not a temporal present like ours, but an eternal [present] in which all times are contained. Just as the present time contains all place and whatever is in any place, in the same way the eternal present encloses all time and whatever exists in any time.... For eternity has its own unique simultaneity...in which exist all the things that exist at the same place or time, and whatever exists in the different places and times.62

If ‘all times’ are contained and ‘enclosed’ in God’s ‘eternal present,’ then it follows that all times co-exist.

While it was not Anselm’s purpose to elaborate on the metaphysical nature of time, that he affirmed the real co-existence of all times in eternity is clear. In preserving the tradition of divine simplicity Anselm denied even the possibility of temporality for God, insisting rather that God exists utterly beyond time in eternity wherein all times (and places) are equally existent to Him.

62 Anselm, De Concordia, I.5, trans. in ‘Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension.’
2.2.4 Thomas Aquinas

The work of Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) offers what is arguably the most sophisticated medieval expression of atemporalism. While absorbing a generous amount of Aristotelianism, Aquinas’s indebtedness to the neo-Platonist tradition, including those within the Christian philosophical theological tradition, is evident. In the context of contemplating the problems of divine foreknowledge and human freedom and theological fatalism, Aquinas maintained the metaphysical simplicity of God’s nature, as well as His existence in a sort of atemporal ‘eternal present.’

Aquinas aligned himself squarely with Augustine, Boethius, and Anselm in insisting upon God’s utter immutability. In his ‘third way,’ for example, Aquinas argues that anything undergoing change must change either for the better or for the worse. Given His infinitude and perfection, though, God cannot change: on the one hand God would become greater, which is impossible for a perfect being; on the other hand, God would lose greatness, which is equally impossible. Thus, according to Aquinas, God cannot change. It is generally agreed, therefore, that Aquinas affirmed that God’s immutability entails divine simplicity. Aquinas moves beyond his predecessors, however, in conceiving of being (esse) as the actuality of essence (ens).

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64 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 1.10.3; Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, trans. T. McDermott (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964).

the existence of composite substances (i.e., combinations of form and matter, e.g., human beings) is derived existence.\(^\text{66}\) But this implies

that everything whose being is distinct from its nature must have being from another. And because everything that exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself as to its first cause, there must be a reality that is the cause of being for all other things, because it is pure being. If this were not so, we would go on to infinity in causes, for everything that is not pure being has a cause of its being.\(^\text{67}\)

As Aquinas argues elsewhere, this higher source of derived existence must be ‘a cause of which existence is the proper effect.’\(^\text{68}\) This cause, of course, must not be itself a composite substance, lest it too possess derived existence. Rather, it must possess ‘being in all its purity; and this is the first cause, or God.’\(^\text{69}\) As the only such being, God alone is eternal.\(^\text{70}\) It follows that God, as the only being in whom there is no distinction between essence and existence, is metaphysically simple.\(^\text{71}\) As Augustine made clear, that which is immutable is metaphysically simple and that which is metaphysically simple must be timelessly eternal. Aquinas’s understanding of God as atemporal is, like Augustine’s, inseparably tethered to his commitment to simplicity.

Aquinas borrows explicitly from Boethius in explaining the nature of eternity. ‘Eternity is the whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life.’\(^\text{72}\) He even

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\(^{66}\) On being and essence, IV.3. Aquinas designates ‘the term “an essence” [to signify] the composite of matter and form’ (op. cit. II.3). See also Summa Theologiae, I.2.3.

\(^{67}\) On being and essence, IV.7.

\(^{68}\) Aquinas, Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia, 7.2, from Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings, trans. Timothy McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

\(^{69}\) On being and essence, IV.7; cf. Summa Theologiae, Ia.3.4 Note the echo of neo-Platonism in Aquinas’ claim that God’s existence—pure being—must lack potentiality in any sense (cf. Plotinus, The Enneads, III.7.3).

\(^{70}\) Summa Theologiae, I.9.2.

\(^{71}\) Summa Theologiae, I.3.1-4.

\(^{72}\) Consolation of Philosophy, V.6; Summa Theologiae, Ia.10.1.
borrows Boethius’ illustration of a spectator observing a line of travelers from atop a summit:

Were someone to see many travelers along a road successively, over a certain period of time, in each part of that time he would see some passers by as present, so that over the whole of time of his vision he would see every traveler as present. He would not see all as present at once because the time of his seeing is not all-at-once. If his seeing were able to exist all at once, he would see at once all as present, although they do not all pass by as present at once. Whence because the vision of God’s knowledge is measured by eternity, which is all at once and yet includes all of time…God sees what happens in time not as future but as present.\(^7^3\)

The thought here is that God timelessly, simultaneously knows all temporal things (thus, strictly speaking, God does not possess *fore*knowledge). Since ‘things altogether unchangeable can no more have a beginning than show successiveness,’ God, as metaphysically simple and therefore identical with eternity, ‘exists as a *simultaneous whole*, lacking successiveness.’\(^7^4\) God sees all times past, present, and future in His eternity ‘as being present to it.’\(^7^5\) Aquinas explains:

Whatever is found in any part of time coexists with what is eternal as being present to it, although with respect to some other time it be past or future. Something can be present to what is eternal only by being present to the whole of it, since the eternal does not have the duration of succession. The divine intellect, therefore, sees in the whole of its eternity, as being present to it, whatever takes place through the whole course of time.\(^7^6\)

Here Aquinas borrows another illustration from Boethius: God is equally present to all times past, present, and future just as the midpoint of a circle is equidistant to all points in

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\(^7^4\) *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.10.1.


\(^7^6\) *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.66.7.
its circumference. It seems best, then, to echo Anselm in characterizing this as an ‘eternal present.’ Thus, ‘God is wholly outside the order of time, stationed as it were at the summit of eternity, which is wholly simultaneous, and to Him the whole course of time is subjected in one single intuition.’

As was the case with his predecessors, Aquinas was not focused on the metaphysical nature of time itself. Nevertheless, we are able to draw from his discussion of God knowledge of future contingents a characterization of ‘the order of time’ an understanding quite similar to that of Anselm. According to Aquinas, God exhaustively knows all times and events simply because they are equally real to Him:

God knows all contingent things not only as they are in their causes, but also as each one is actually in itself...The reason is because His knowledge is measured by eternity, as is also His being; and eternity, being simultaneously whole, comprises all time...Hence, all things that are in time are present to God from eternity, not only because He has the essences of things present within Him...but because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentality.

The idea is that all times are equally existent and thus accessible to God in His privileged eternity. Or again as he writes in the Summa Contra Gentiles:

77 Summa Contra Gentiles, I.66.7; cf. Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, IV.6. As I will later argue, it is telling that Aquinas employs strongly metaphysical language to describe God’s ‘knowledge of vision’—language that seemingly implies all times (and events in time) are on an ontological par.

78 Aquinas, In Perihermeneias, 14.20.

79 Although he was heavily indebted to the neo-Platonist tradition regarding eternity, it was the Aristotelian conception of time that Aquinas employed. Aristotle defined time as ‘the number of a motion with respect to the prior and the posterior,’ that is, the before and after (Aristotle, Physics, 218b2-4). Aristotle defines motion as ‘the actuality of the potentially existing qua existing potentially’ (Physics, 218a10-11). Time is not itself identical with motion, although without motion time cannot exist (Physics, 218b10-21). Time is therefore the measure of motion, and it is this definition we find approvingly quoted by Aquinas (Summa Theologiae, 1a.10.1; cf. Aquinas, Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics, lecture 17).

The divine intellect from all eternity knows things not only according to the being that they have in their causes, but also according to the being that they have *in themselves*.

We cannot say that this is known by God as non-existent, so as to leave room for the question whether it can not-be; rather, it will be said to be known by God in such a way that it is seen by Him already *in its own existence*…For that which already is cannot, with respect to that moment of time, not-be.\(^8\)

It is by being eternally present to Him in this way that *all* events are known to God.

Aquinas is clear that this presence is not merely epistemic (just in God’s mind which is the view of Augustine), but all events actually exist, metaphysically, in themselves. In other words, the future in some sense must *already* actually exist, even though such times or events are yet to exist temporally. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in his *Compendium theologiae*: ‘Even before [future contingents] come into being, He sees them as they actually exist, and not merely as they will be in the future.’\(^9\) The upshot of all this is that according to Aquinas the past, present, and future are simultaneously present and thus equally real to God, while from our perspective things come to be successively. Hence all times are on a par ontologically.

### 2.2.5 John Duns Scotus

The view of God as existing timelessly was clearly the consensus view in the medieval era; it did not, however, attain the elevated status of orthodox Christian dogma. It is generally recognized that with John Duns Scotus (1266 – 1308) began a significant shift in how time was conceived—a shift which paved the way for temporalist understandings of God. As Calvin Normore explains:

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\(^8\) *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.67.3, 9. Here I follow Craig’s discussion.

\(^9\) Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, 133.
When considered against the background of Aquinas’ position, Scotus’ discussions of God’s knowledge signal the clash of two fundamentally different ways of conceiving the nature of time. The first, which seems to have been Boethius’ and may have been Aquinas’, conceives the difference between past and future as perspectival rather than ontological….The second view, the one for which Scotus argues and the one which seems to be taken more or less for granted in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, sees the difference between past and future as an objective difference, one that exists for God as well as for us.

As with his predecessors, Scotus’ immediate concern was God’s infallible knowledge of future contingents. It was in the course of solving this problem that Scotus rejected the prevailing conception of time as static (i.e., of the view that all times exist on an ontological par) and thus rejected his predecessors’ accompanying conceptions of God’s foreknowledge. The key to understanding this rejection and the development of his own view is Scotus’ doctrine of synchronic contingency, the central treatment of which is distinction 39 of the first book of his commentary on Peter Lombard’s Sentences.

Scotus introduces his view by rejecting three previous positions, one of which was the influential modal ontology of Aristotle. On the standard reading of De interpretatione 9, Aristotle defended a modal system according to which real contingency

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84 In his Lectura I d.39, q. 5, Scotus denies the ontological equality of the past, present, and future: ‘Furthermore, I ask how God knows future contingents as they will be created. Does He know such things certainly or not? If certainly and as they will be created, they are future; then He knows them certainly as they are future to Him and will be created by Him. But if He does not know them certainly, then His knowing of what has been made is different from His knowing of what will be made, - and that goes against Augustine, that His knowing of what will be made is as certain as when it has been made’ (all quotes are from John Duns Scotus: Contingency and Freedom: Lectura I 39, trans. and ed. with intro. and commentary by A. Vos Jaczn., et. al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994); cf. Scotus, Ordinatio I d. 39.

exists.\textsuperscript{86} Simply put, Aristotle held that a state of affairs $P$ is contingent if another state of affairs $\neg P$ obtains or possibly obtains at a \textit{different} moment. As he put it: ‘What is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not.’\textsuperscript{87} On Aristotle’s theory the possibility of $\neg P$ obtains for a later moment, and does \textit{not} obtain for the \textit{same} moment at which $P$ obtains.\textsuperscript{88} As is frequently noted, this theory allows for contingency only in the sense of change through time.

Scotus rejected this view as ‘necessitarian’ and inadequate, insisting rather that genuine contingency requires that a state of affairs $P$ and an opposed state of affairs $\neg P$ both be real possibilities at the \textit{same} moment. Scotus distinguished two senses in which Aristotle’s claim could be taken: the composite sense and the divided sense. On the former, Aristotle means simply ‘everything is when it is’ is necessary, which claim Scotus regards as trivially true. Taken in the latter sense, however, Aristotle means ‘everything which is, when it is, is necessary.’\textsuperscript{89} Scotus rejects this sense of the claim as false, ‘because something contingent is not necessary when it is.’\textsuperscript{90} In other words Scotus denies the necessity of the present. While much could be said about Scotus’ account, we are here interested only in the fact that it is incompatible with the static theory of time.

Scotus agreed that contradictory states of affairs cannot simultaneously obtain; it is both physically and metaphysically impossible for $P$ and $\neg P$ to both obtain—be

\textsuperscript{86} For a thorough treatment of the various interpretations of \textit{De interpretatione} 9, see Craig, \textit{The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge}, pp. 1-28.


\textsuperscript{88} Jaczn, et. al., \textit{Contingency and Freedom}, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{89} Scotus, \textit{Lectura}, I.39.58.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Lectura}, I.39.58.
factual—at some moment \( t_1 \).

If \( P \) obtains at \( t_1 \), then it is impossible for \( \neg P \) to obtain at \( t_1 \). For Scotus, what is required for genuine contingency, though, is that both \( P \) and \( \neg P \) be equally possible at \( t_1 \). If, however, the past and the future are equally as real as the present (as the static theory claims), then all moments including \( t_1 \) are equally real. But if \( t_1 \) is actual, then either \( P \) or \( \neg P \) now obtain. Of course, from our temporal location in static time we may be unable to ‘see’ which state of affairs obtains at \( t_1 \), but that does not change the fact that at \( t_1 \) either \( P \) or \( \neg P \) obtain. It follows, then, that at \( t_1 \) either \( P \) or \( \neg P \) possibly obtain, but not both. In other words, inasmuch as \( t_1 \) is actual, then only one state of affairs possibly obtains. If, on the other hand, \( t_1 \) is not yet real (as the dynamic theory allows), then both \( P \) and \( \neg P \) are possible at that moment. Thus Scotus’ theory of synchronic contingency demands the dynamic theory of time—the view that denies all times are on an ontological par.

From this it follows that

Eternity will not...be present to any non-existent time....If (assuming the impossible) the whole of time were simultaneously existent, the whole would be simultaneously present to eternity....For the ‘now’ of eternity is formally infinite and therefore formally exceeds the ‘now’ of time. Nevertheless it does not co-exist with another ‘now’.

This did not lead Scotus to a wholesale abandonment of the familiar, Boethian/Thomistic circle illustration as one may expect. Rather, Scotus tweaked the illustration to reflect his dynamic view of time:

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91 This has been a standard commitment since Aristotle (Metaphysics, Book 4, 1011b25; cf. Metaphysics, 1012a4 and esp. 1051b6).


If a straight line is drawn, an extreme point of which being the center, and the other extremity turning around [circumvolvatur]—according to the imagination of the geometrician—so that nothing remains still, but rather it causes the circumference to flow, then that center does not coexist with the circumference as a whole, because the circumference does not exist at one time.\(^{94}\)

According to Duns Scotus, then, the circle is not taken as having already been completed (as on the Boethian/Thomistic conception), that is, it is not simply given as a whole. This is because, as we have already seen, according to Scotus, the future does not yet exist in any way. Consequently, the circle of time is in process of being drawn by the geometrician.

Given his commitment to dynamic time coupled with his explicit denial that the ‘now’ of eternity could co-exist with the ‘now’ of time, it is interesting to note that Scotus nevertheless affirmed God’s atemporality. He is careful, though, to promote a position that does not demand the static view of time.\(^{95}\) Whether this position is coherent or not is a question which must here be set aside. Scotus (like his predecessors) upheld the doctrine of divine simplicity, which as we have seen entails atemporality.\(^{96}\) Regardless, Scotus was the first to question the longstanding doctrine of the ‘eternal present’ by rejecting the prevalent static conception of time in favor of the dynamic conception, thus paving the way for subsequent temporalist understandings of God.

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\(^{95}\) Some Scotus scholars have argued that Scotus may in fact have changed his mind regarding God’s relation to time (e.g., Richard Cross, ‘Duns Scotus on Eternity and Timelessness,’ *Faith and Philosophy* 14 [1997]: 3-25).

\(^{96}\) Scotus, *De Primo Principio*, 4.1-4, 75. It is worth noting that Scotus has some important disagreements with the Thomistic conception of simplicity (see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 29f).
2.2.6 William of Ockham

Building on the seminal thought of Duns Scotus, the work of William of Ockham (1285 – 1347) has received considerable attention in recent years. Like that of most Medievals, Ockham’s consideration of time takes shape within the Aristotelian framework: without motion there can be no time. Thus Ockham agrees that time is ‘the number of a motion with respect to the prior and the posterior,’ that is, the before and after. However, whereas Aquinas accepts Aristotle’s conclusion that ‘time is not itself identical with motion, although without motion time cannot exist,’ Ockham holds that ‘time is the motion by which the mind knows how much another motion is.’ While it seems Ockham would agree that any motion by which any other motion can be measured (numerically) thereby is sufficient to generate time, it must be borne in mind that Ockham denied the reality of numbers. It follows, then, that time does not exist apart from substances in motion. According to Ockham there is but one substance(s) which is

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101 This is a consequence of Ockham’s general program of nominalism, whereby he denied the existence of universals in nature, claiming rather that such concepts are merely the mind’s cognition of some singular (see, e.g., *Expositio super librum Perihermenias* 8, in *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Philotheus Boehner [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1990], pp. 43-45). For a thorough exposition of the development of Ockham’s view of universals see Adams, *William Ockham* vol. I, pp. 73-107.
in uniform motion (or what he terms ‘prime motion’): the heavenly bodies. He explains: ‘time
is not something other than the prime motion, because through the prime
motion…we know for how long temporal things endure, move, or rest. And still “time”
and “prime motion” differ in definition, since “time” imports a soul…’\textsuperscript{102} As Garrett
DeWeese observes, ‘since [on Ockham’s view] prime motion is uniform, successive parts
of it will succeed one another uniformly, and so instants of time succeed one another
uniformly,’ which denies that all times are on an ontological par.\textsuperscript{103}

Ockham is recognized as the first explicitly to reject the atemporal view of God.

As William Lane Craig explains:

For Ockham the relationship between God’s foreknowledge and future
contingents was a literally conceived concern, for he held that God’s
eternity was not a state of timelessness, but that God, though
immutable, endures throughout all past, present, and future time,
which arises from the order of succession among changing things.\textsuperscript{104}

This can be derived from Ockham’s employment of an innovative modal notion:
necessity \textit{per accidens} (accidental necessity).\textsuperscript{105}

According to Ockham bivalence holds for future contingent propositions. That is,
propositions involving future contingents are either true or false. Moreover, God eternally
knows which part of any contradictory is true and which is false.\textsuperscript{106} The truth or falsity of
such propositions derives from the instantiation of certain states of affairs. So the


\textsuperscript{103} DeWeese, \textit{God and the Nature of Time}, p. 196.

\textsuperscript{104} Craig, \textit{The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge}, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{105} While the notion of necessity \textit{per accidens} did not originate with Ockham, his appropriation of it was historic. The great English logician William of Sherwood was already making use of this notion in the thirteenth century (see Norman Kretzmann, \textit{William of Sherwood’s Introduction to Logic} [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966], p. 41).

\textsuperscript{106} Ockham, \textit{Summa Logicae}, 3.3.32.54-69.
proposition ‘Peter denies Christ’ is true upon the instantiation of the state of affairs

‘Peter’s denying Christ.’ That said, since

the states of the actual world are instantiated...successively, it remains contingent whether any state of affairs obtains until it is *temporally* instantiated. Thus, for any given state of affairs in the actual world, it is crucial to know when it obtains; one should always specify it with a definite temporal indexical: ‘S obtains at $t_n$.’

So, if it is now $t_1$, and Peter denies Christ at $t_5$, then the proposition ‘Peter denies Christ at $t_5$’ is now true (because that state of affairs will obtain in the actual world). The proposition remains contingent, however, until $t_5$. Thereafter,

once $S$ has been instantiated, it is no longer contingent whether $S$ obtains, and so [the proposition] is necessary. This is because it is impossible to change the past.... Prior to [that moment] it is genuinely possible that $S$ not be instantiated, even though it will be; thereafter, it is impossible.

The proposition’s being possibly true or possibly false up till $t_5$ and either *necessarily* true or *necessarily* false thereafter is what Ockham calls necessity *per accidens*. Obviously no state of affairs is necessary *per accidens* until it (temporally) obtains in the actual world.

This sets the stage for Ockham’s introduction of what philosophers, following Nelson Pike, have come to call ‘soft facts’ about the past. Simply put, the idea is that some facts are really about the past (e.g., the Allies invaded Normandy on 6 June 1944), whereas some facts about the past are actually (at least partially) about a later time (e.g., Churchill knew on 5 June 1944 that the Allies would invade Normandy on 6 June 1944). Ockham writes:

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[Objection 5a.] On the contrary: every proposition that is true now and can be false can change from truth to falsity. But suppose that the proposition ‘Peter is predestinate’ is true now and can be false (as is consistent); therefore, [‘Peter is predestinate’ can change from truth to falsity.]

[Reply.] I maintain that the major premise is false, since more is required—i.e., that the proposition that will be false or will be capable of being false was true at some time. Therefore, although the proposition ‘Peter is predestinate’ is true now and can be false, nevertheless when it will be false, it will be true to say that it never was true. Therefore, it cannot change from truth to falsity.\textsuperscript{110}

The claim here is that God’s knowledge of future contingents, while immutable, is nevertheless not necessary because it is temporally contingent up till the moment its corresponding states of affairs are instantiated. Therefore, Ockham’s claim is that it is possible that, should \( \neg S \) be true, it will have been the case that ‘God knows that \( S \)’ will always have been false.\textsuperscript{111} Ockham is emphatic, after all, that God has perfect knowledge of future contingents:

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\textsuperscript{111} DeWeese, p. 199. This line of reasoning raises interesting questions about how God could give a strong prophetic message (such as Peter’s denial) if it is truly contingent until it has happened—especially since he accused Scotus of ‘failing to preserve the certainty of God’s knowledge in respect of future things that depend on a created will’ (\textit{Ordinatio}, d. 38, P)! It is beyond the scope of the present work to assess fully how on Ockham’s view God can possess certain knowledge of future contingents, a concern Ockham himself harbored: ‘This argument notwithstanding, it must nevertheless be maintained that God has evident cognition of all future contingents. But I do not know how to describe the way [in which He has it]’ (Ockham, \textit{Ordinatio}, d. 38, M, in William Ockham, \textit{Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents}, ed., Adams and Kretzmann, pp. 89-90). Ockham tentatively suggests that God has such knowledge as a result of ‘an intuitive cognition that is so perfect, so clear, that it is an evident cognition of all things past and future, so that it knows which part of a contradiction [involving such things] is true and which part false’ (\textit{Ordinatio}, assumption 6, p. 50). However, as Adams and Kretzmann point out, in order for God to know from eternity that Peter would deny Christ, He would have to have judged as much from eternity. But this would seemingly entail that the proposition \textit{God, from eternity, judged that Peter would deny Christ} is a necessarily true proposition about the past (\textit{Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents}, pp. 19-20).
\end{flushright}
It must be held beyond question that God knows with certainty all future contingents—i.e., He knows with certainty which part of the contradiction is true and which false.\textsuperscript{112}

The upshot of all this for our purposes is that, since states of affairs are instantiated successively (that is, are not all equally real), Ockham’s view demands a dynamic view of time.\textsuperscript{113} While Ockham does affirm the immutability and determinacy of God’s foreknowledge, such knowledge is nevertheless said to be contingent until the instantiation of the relevant future contingents. This, coupled with his clear rejection of the atemporal view, reveal in Ockham at least a strong tacit commitment to a temporal view of God.

\textbf{2.2.7 Luis de Molina}

While Duns Scotus insisted on the dynamic view of time, he could not break with the entrenched atemporalist tradition. William Ockham was more willing to take Scotus’ view to its logical conclusion: time is dynamic and God is temporal in nature. Ockham’s shortcoming, however, was his inability to say precisely how a temporal God can have infallible knowledge of future contingents. Late in the sixteenth century, Luis de Molina (1549 – 1600), a Spanish Jesuit of the Counter-Reformation, devised an ingenious scheme that allowed for complete, infallible foreknowledge of causally indeterminate, future contingents: the doctrine of ‘middle knowledge.’\textsuperscript{114} Molina is perspicuous in his

\textsuperscript{112} Ockham, \textit{Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents}, p. 48.


advocacy of the dynamic view of time, as well as in his rejection of the atemporalist understanding of foreknowledge.

Molina begins Disputation 48 of the fourth book of his *Concordia* (‘Whether All the Things That Exist, Have Existed, and Will Exist in Time Are Present to God from Eternity with Their Own Proper Existence’) by reasserting the Boethian conception of a privileged divine eternity:

> [E]ternity is in itself a certain indivisible duration, a simultaneous whole having as a unit an infinite durational latitude by virtue of which it coexists and corresponds as a whole with the whole of time and as a whole with each interval of time... It follows that the whole of time and whatever exists or successively comes to exist in it coexists with and exists in the indivisible now of eternity, before which there is nothing and after which there is nothing, and in which there is found no before or after and no past or future, but only an indivisible, simultaneously whole duration.\(^{115}\)

As we have seen this definition leads directly to an atemporalist understanding of God and its accompanying view of time as static. Molina surprises us, however, by echoing Scotus’ objection to Aquinas. Recall that for Aquinas God has knowledge of contingents as present via ‘the knowledge of vision’ which ‘is carried from eternity over all things.’\(^{116}\) In response Molina summarizes the objection of Scotus:

That which does not exist is not able to coexist with anything, since coexistence requires the existence of both terms. But future things do not yet exist, nor have they existed. Therefore, they do not coexist from eternity with either God or eternity, and hence they are not present to God from eternity with their actual existence.\(^{117}\)

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The claim here is that the ‘presence relation’ demanded by the foregoing atemporalist scheme(s) is necessarily dyadic. But if, as Molina maintains, ‘future things do not exist either in the present time or at the moment of present time,’ then they ‘do not…coexist with God or with eternity, nor do they at that time exist in eternity.’ The idea is that if future things exist neither in the present nor within the divine eternity, then they do not exist in any sense at all. According to Molina, it is no deficiency on God’s part for an as yet non-existent time to fail to be present to God. As we have seen, such a rejection constitutes a tacit acceptance of the dynamic theory of time. For if future things exist neither in time nor in God’s eternity, then they do not exist at all, which the static theory of time strictly disallows. This puts Molina (as with Scotus) in the awkward position of claiming both Boethian eternality and the dynamic view of time (with its resultant denial of any existing future things). Despite the incongruity of these two commitments, Molina’s affirmation of each is evident.

Molina explicitly denies that God’s foreknowledge of future contingents is, pace Aquinas, based on a ‘knowledge of vision’ in eternity:

I do not believe, nor is it to be conceded, that (i) the things that come to be in time exist in eternity before they exist in time, or that (ii) they

119 Yet, as Freddoso notes, ‘To be sure Molina cheerfully concedes the proposition “All future things exist in eternity” is true, as long as “exist” expresses the eternal present. What he means is simply that there will never be a creature that exists in time without being present to God in eternity, and this by virtue of the fact that God’s eternity…necessarily embraces every moment of time that happens to exist’ (‘Introduction,’ p. 32).
120 This tension drives Molina as far as denying that Aquinas truly believed that God knows future contingents due to their actual presence: “[D]espite the arguments just adduced, I would not dare to claim that St. Thomas, whom in all things I desire to have as a patron…believed that God knows future contingents with certainty solely on the basis of the presence of things with actual existence. Rather, if he were asked about this issue, he would, I believe, affirm the contrary position’ (On Divine Foreknowledge, IV.49.7). One cannot help but sense that Molina initially endorses atemporalism largely out of deference to Aquinas.
are present to God in eternity with their own existence before they are actually present in time, or that (iii) it is because things exist in eternity that God foreknows future contingents with certainty before they exist in time.121

Interestingly, these three claims are central to atemporalism, which implies that Molina’s advocacy of the atemporalist view is tenuous at best. This becomes clearer when he claims:

It should not be thought that the things that come to be successively in time exist in eternity before they exist in time—as though it was because of some sort of anticipation they have in eternity with respect to existence outside their causes that they are known with certainty in eternity while they are still future in time. Yet this is what would have had to be true in order for it to be the case that it was because of the existence of things in eternity that God foreknew them with certainty before they came to be in time…. If this was the claim being made by Boethius, St. Thomas, and the others…then I frankly confess that I do not understand it, nor do I think there is any way in which it can be true.122

As we have seen, that is precisely the claim made by Boethius and Aquinas. This rejection, coupled with his conspicuous acceptance of dynamic time, led Molina critically to modify the familiar model of eternity as a circle whose midpoint is equidistant to all points (of time) in its circumference:

An appropriate model is the center point of a circle in relation to the circle drawn around it…. While the circle is being drawn, the center point does not yet correspond to the part still to be drawn, but corresponds only to the part already drawn. And this is not because the center point is lacking something that is required in order for it to correspond to the part still to be drawn; rather, it is because what is lacking is that very part to which the center point, in itself already existing as a whole, would correspond. But once the entire circle has been drawn, the center corresponds to the whole circumference and to each of its parts. In the same way, as long as the whole of time has not

121 On Divine Foreknowledge, IV.49.15.
122 On Divine Foreknowledge, IV.49.16.

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yet elapsed, indivisible eternity corresponds not to the whole of time, but to the part that has elapsed.\textsuperscript{123}

The circumference of the circle representing the moments of time cannot fully be drawn because the time(s) that it represents are not equally real; they do not exist on an ontological par. Molina’s denial that the future exists in any sense in eternity is significant. Despite his affirmation of atemporalism, in light of his views on the nature of time Molina’s position on God’s relation to time appears closer to that of Scotus than Boethius and Aquinas.

In tracing the development of the concepts of time and eternity from their assimilation by Augustine into Christian thought, the substantial influence of Neo-Platonism is evident. There can be no doubt that this influence safeguarded the dominance of the atemporalist view through the thirteenth century, when beginning with Scotus dissentients began to increase in number. Although the metaphysical nature of time had received little direct treatment, the assumption that all points of time past, present, and future are equally real is increasingly evident from Boethius through Aquinas. With Scotus, however, this prevailing conception of time as static was rejected in favor of a dynamic view of time: all moments of time are not equally real. This rejection both paved the way for subsequent temporalist understandings of God and drew the issue of the metaphysical nature of time to the center of the God and time debate.

2.3 \textbf{Contemporary Proponents of Divine Atemporality}

Though we can be reasonably sure that the atemporalism of Boethius and Aquinas remained the majority view up to the 19th century, I shall not enter into a prolonged

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{On Divine Foreknowledge}, IV.49.18.
demonstration of this claim. While interesting, perhaps, from an historical point of view, it is ultimately not essential to this thesis. Contemporary defenders of the atemporalist position have offered increasingly sophisticated and nuanced versions of divine atemporalism. Preeminent among these are several scholars with whom Craig interacts extensively in his published work: Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, and Paul Helm.

2.3.1 Brian Leftow

Brian Leftow (1956 - ) is Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at the University of Oxford, where he is a Fellow at Oriel College. Leftow, an ardent contemporary atemporalist, has written extensively in defense of the atemporal notion of eternity. He also has argued against the plausibility of the temporal understanding of God, in particular arguing that a timeless being is metaphysically superior to a temporal being. Explicitly building on the Augustinian claim that timeless existence is ‘more genuinely existence than temporal, that timeless beings exist more genuinely than temporal ones,’ he maintains that a temporal God’s life is diminished in

124 Alan Padgett offers ample references to support this claim (God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time, pp. 52-53).


127 Leftow, Time and Eternity, pp. 278ff.

128 Leftow, Time and Eternity, p. 82.
various ways. For example, ‘whatever has a location in time is ipso facto unable to enjoy what is past or future for it: its past is gone, and its future is not yet come.’ A timeless God, however, who ‘lives all His life at once…would suffer no tinge of loss,’ which is metaphysically superior. Or again, as a perfect knower, God must have ideal grounds for all His beliefs. But ‘if God is temporal, God knows what is past…not by direct cognitive contact but by memory. If God is timeless, nothing is past for Him, and God can know what is past (for us) by direct cognitive contact.’ Such differences, Leftow maintains, are deficiencies inherent in temporal existence, and so God cannot be temporal.

We have seen that atemporalists regard God as being ‘temporally omnipresent,’ that is, as concurrently present at all different times. Seeking to affirm both the flow of time as well as the eternal ‘frozen’ existence of the same in eternity, the atemporalist’s challenge is to articulate just how to solve this antinomy: how can God be simultaneously present at all (non-simultaneous) times? Leftow’s own contribution is an attempt at meeting this challenge.

Beginning in typical atemporalist fashion with an affirmation of divine simplicity, Leftow offers a reading of Boethius’ understanding of eternity he calls ‘quasi-temporal eternity’. Following Boethius, Leftow suggests that ‘eternal life contains earlier and later points, but with no succession between them. An eternal being could be one which somehow lives at once all moments of a life whose moments are ordered as earlier and

129 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 278.
130 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 279.
Despite the ‘earlier and later’ ordering within this ‘timeless duration’ of God’s life, Leftow explains that ‘none of it “passes away” or is “yet to come,” as we think happens with temporal lives.’ This, recall, is essential to satisfying the Boethian definition of the fullness of divine life lived all at once. In other words, each ‘moment’ is frozen in its eternal position. Relations among these moments can be ‘earlier’ or ‘later’ than one another only subjectively. Thus quasi-temporal extension seems unavoidably to imply that all times past, present, and future exist on an ontological par (i.e., the static theory of time). Regardless, though he deems it a useful and coherent notion, Leftow lays aside quasi-temporal extension and defends instead a complex Anselmian view of eternity. Like Anselm, who located God beyond time in an ‘eternal present,’ Leftow argues ‘God is temporally omnipresent and omnicontiguous, as if eternity were a higher dimension in which He and temporal things coexist.’

The idea is that all (non-simultaneous) times can be simultaneously present to God because all events occur at once within an (atemporal) eternal reference frame. Thus all events and temporal entities share a simultaneity relation such that they occur at the same ‘eternal present.’ Leftow rests his proposal upon two clever theses. The first he terms the ‘Zero Thesis,’ according to which ‘the distance between God and every spatial creature is zero.’ Leftow reasons that God, being a non-spatial being, cannot be

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133 Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 120.
134 Though he doesn’t acknowledge his theory’s dependence on the static theory, Leftow does concede that his view ‘likens extension in QTE to an extension in tenseless time’ (*Op. cit.*).
spatially located in reference to any spatial being. Thus there is zero spatial distance between God and any such being, which Leftow analyzes as meaning ‘there is a distance-relation between God and any spatial entity, and the distance between them is zero.’

This thesis implies what Leftow acknowledges is ‘a startling consequence.’ Namely, there is no motion relative to God, although he is quick to claim this does not rule out motion relative to other things (i.e., there can be motion in other reference frames). The second thesis Leftow simply terms (M). According to (M), ‘there is no change of any sort involving spatial, material entities unless there is also a change of place, i.e., a motion involving some material entity.’ With these two theses in hand, Leftow presents his argument:

\[G\]iven the Zero Thesis, (M), and one very general property of time (its being a fourth dimension of an extensive continuum), it follows that in the actual world there is no motion or change relative to God. So if a frame of reference is a system of objects at rest relative to one another, then it appears that God and all spatial objects share a frame of reference, one in which nothing changes…. \[R\]elative to God, the whole span of temporal events is actually there all at once. Thus in God’s frame of reference…all events are simultaneous. But all events are simultaneous in no temporal reference frame. Therefore the reference frame God shares with all events is atemporal.

While a number of objections have been raised in response to Leftow’s proposal, it is well beyond the scope of the present work to rehearse them. Laying these concerns

138 Leftow, Time and Eternity, p. 222.
139 Leftow, Time and Eternity, p. 227.
140 Leftow, Time and Eternity, pp. 227-228.
aside, let us briefly consider Leftow’s claim that his view is consistent with either the static or the dynamic view of time.\textsuperscript{142} Despite his (quite understandable) desire to achieve consistency with dynamic time, it seems Leftow’s view unavoidably entails static time. In claiming that within the eternal reference frame all events atemporally exist, Leftow means that ‘in eternity events are in effect frozen in an array of positions corresponding to their ordering in various B-series.’\textsuperscript{143} There are various B-series, he explains, because each (non-eternal) reference frame generates its own unique such series. In order to demonstrate compatibility with a dynamic view of time, however, Leftow must go a step further and show how literally not-yet-existing or no-longer-existing events (e.g., the future and past, on a dynamic view) can be present in any B-series. He suggests that ‘it can be true at a time $t$ that an event dated at $t+1$ has not yet occurred in time, and yet also correct at $t$ to say that that very event exists in eternity. That all events occur at once in eternity, I submit, does not entail that they all occur at once in time.’\textsuperscript{144} But this just is an expression of the static view of time: all times and events eternally co-exist and are statically ordered by the tenseless relations of earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than. The view Leftow seems unavoidably to share with the Medievals, then, is not that there is one moment of time and all times and events occur simultaneously at that moment. It is, rather, that all times and events eternally exist on an ontological par.

\textsuperscript{142} Leftow writes, ‘Now I am not going to enter the lists for or against tenseless theories of time. Rather… I hope to show… that the existence of an eternal being and of the eternal simultaneity relation I suggest is compatible with a tensed theory of time, according to which only present (and perhaps past) events exist (in time), so that there is a genuine and radical ontological distinction between present (and perhaps past) events and future events’ (‘Eternity and Simultaneity,’ 165; cf. his remarks in Time and Eternity, p. 18).

\textsuperscript{143} ‘Eternity and Simultaneity,’ 170.

\textsuperscript{144} ‘Eternity and Simultaneity,’ 165.
2.3.2 Eleonore Stump/Norman Kretzmann

Eleonore Stump (1947 - ) is the Robert J. Henle Professor of Philosophy at Saint Louis University, and Norman Kretzmann (1928 – 1998) was the Susan Linn Sage Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University. Both world-renowned Medievalists and proponents of divine atemporalism, Stump and Kretzmann have collaborated to explain how an atemporal God could be related to the temporal world.\(^{145}\) Like Leftow, Stump and Kretzmann have also argued that God cannot be temporal because temporal existence is inferior to atemporal existence:

In keeping with the (atemporalist) conception [of eternity], the necessarily beginningless and endless life of a perfect being must…be possessed perfectly. No life…that is imperfect in its being possessed with the radical incompleteness entailed by temporal existence could be the mode of existence of an absolutely perfect being. A perfectly possessed life must be devoid of any past, which would be no longer possessed, and of any future, which would be not yet possessed. The existence of an absolutely perfect being would be an indivisibly persistent present actuality.\(^{146}\)

The idea, building on the foundation of Boethius and Anselm, is that the divine life cannot be divided into past, present, and future, because a life so divided is not maximal existence. God, who ‘most truly exists,’ cannot therefore be temporal.

In their seminal article ‘Eternity,’ Stump and Kretzmann explain that, although an atemporal God cannot exist sequentially, that

does not rule out the attribution of presentness or simultaneity to the life and relationships of such an entity, nor should it. Insofar as an


\(^{146}\) Stump and Kretzmann, ‘Prophecy, Past Truth and Eternity,’ 395 (emphasis mine).
entity is, or has life…it is appropriate to say that is has present existence in some sense of ‘present’; and unless its life consists in only one event or it is impossible to relate an event in its life to any temporal entity or event, we need to be able to consider an eternal entity or event as one of the relata in a simultaneity relationship.  

Thus they propose a version of simultaneity according to which an atemporal God can have present existence: ET-simultaneity.

The idea is that two relata, x and y—where ‘x’ and ‘y’ range over entities and events—are ET-simultaneous if:

(i) either x is eternal and y is temporal, or vice versa; and

(ii) for some observer, A, in the unique eternal frame, x and y are both present—i.e., either x is eternally present and y is observed as temporally present, or vice versa; and

(iii) for some observer, B, in one of the infinitely many temporal reference frames, x and y are both present—i.e., either x is observed as eternally present and y is observed as eternally present and y is temporally present, or vice versa.

Central to this proposal is understanding the role the observers’ frames of reference. A temporal entity x is ET-simultaneous with an atemporal entity y if from the eternal reference frame y is eternally present and x is observed as temporally present, and from the relevant temporal reference frame x is observed as temporally present and y is observed as eternally present. As Paul Helm explains, ‘x and y can only be ET-simultaneous by being observed as such by an appropriate observer; hence no event, qua event, is ET-simultaneous with any other event.’ If coherent, this conception would

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147 ‘Eternity,’ 434.
148 ‘Eternity,’ 439.
explain how an atemporal God can be present with the temporal creation without entering time.

Though breathtaking in its ingenuity, the notion of ET-simultaneity has been widely rejected by temporalists and atemporalists alike for a variety of reasons.\textsuperscript{150} For present purposes it will suffice to note that ET-simultaneity, though innovative, rests upon an unclear notion of observation. According to Stump and Kretzmann’s (iii), a temporal observer observes an event as eternal and an atemporal observer observes the same event as temporal. What does this mean? When temporal beings \textit{observe}, they do so at some moment of time $t$. Indeed, ‘the event of $y$ observing $x$ at $t$ is identical with the event of $x$’s being observed by $y$ at $t$.\textsuperscript{151} Yet eternal events do not (indeed, cannot) exist in time. Thus it is far from clear how a temporal observer can \textit{observe} something without that thing being part of a temporal series. It seems Stump and Kretzmann have merely couched the same difficulty in the more sophisticated language of ET-simultaneity: relative to an eternal reference frame $x$ is eternally present and $y$ is temporally present, while from a temporal reference frame $x$ is temporally present and $y$ is eternally present. Yet the question at hand is precisely \textit{how} this is possible. As Helm sums up, Stump and Kretzmann’s proposal merely ‘reword[s] the problem with the help of the device of ET-simultaneity…[which] has no independent merit or use, nothing is illuminated or explained by it.’\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Lewis, ‘Eternity Again,’ 75.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Helm, \textit{Eternal God}, p. 33.
\end{itemize}
2.3.3 Paul Helm

Paul Helm, sometime J. I. Packer Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Regent College, as well as a lecturer at Highland Theological College, is a leading contemporary defender of the atemporal view. Situated squarely within the tradition of Boethius and Anselm, Helm has written extensively on God’s relation to time.\(^{153}\) Beginning with the ‘basic theistic intuition’ of ‘divine fullness,’ by which he means the idea that ‘God’s fullness is such that he possesses the whole of his life together,’ Helm argues that an immutable God must be beyond time.\(^{154}\) One hears in this the clear echoes of the Boethian definition of eternity. According to Helm, ‘whether or not an eternalist [i.e., a proponent of the atemporal view] believes in divine simplicity…eternity implies immutability in a very strong sense.’\(^{155}\) In fact, it is not that God could but in fact does not change, Helm claims that God’s ‘perfect nature is such that he need not and cannot change.’\(^{156}\) However, the life of a temporal God, argues Helm, would have segments: a past, present, and future. Yet, ‘those segments that existed before the present moment…together constitute a part of God's life that is over and done with. And the eternalist will say that such an idea is incompatible with God's fullness and self-sufficiency.’\(^{157}\) Yet we know from Scripture that the God of Christianity is a God who

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\(^{155}\) ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 34.

\(^{156}\) ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 35; cf. his discussion of immutability in *Eternal God*, pp. 85-90. Helm calls this utter inability for God to change ‘essential total changelessness,’ the view that ‘God is immutable if nothing about Him could change.’

acts, seemingly now doing this and now doing that. If this is so, then given God’s immutability, Helm concludes God

must be timelessly eternal, since any action in time (as opposed to an action the effect of which is in time) presupposes a time before the act, and a time when the act is completed, and thus presupposes real change, which rules out immutability.  

Like his predecessors, Helm is therefore convinced ‘that divine immutability in this sense entails eternity’ (conceived in the Boethian tradition).  

Helm further supports his view by rejecting a temporal conception of God. He reasons that ‘the idea that God exists in an infinitely backward extending time runs up against the idea of an actual infinity.’ The idea is that God’s existing in infinitely backward extending time would entail the occurrence of an infinite number of events before the present moment, which is impossible. This is because the occurrence of an infinite number of events would take an infinite amount of time. If an infinite amount of time must elapse before the arrival of the present moment, however, then the present moment will not arrive. Yet given the existence of the present moment of time, it follows that an infinite number of events has not occurred. ‘Therefore, either there was a time when God began to exist, which is impossible, or God exists timelessly. Therefore, God exists timelessly.’  

The strength of Helm’s view is also what sets Helm apart from most of his atemporalist predecessors and peers: an explicit endorsement of the static theory of time. He writes, ‘it makes better sense for the eternalist [i.e., atemporalists] to suppose that God

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158 Eternal God, p. 90.
159 Eternal God, p. 87.
161 Eternal God, p. 38.
created the temporal order as a B-series.'\textsuperscript{162} He claims that the past, present, and future find analogues in ‘the spatial distinctions between here and there, and before and behind.’\textsuperscript{163} Whereas Anselm, Aquinas, Leftow, \textit{et. al.} struggle in vain to retain tensed time alongside their atemporalism, Helm has recognized the need to jettison the language of objective tense and affirm the static theory of time.

Helm’s primary contribution to the atemporalist camp is his articulation of the doctrine of the ‘two standpoints.’ Helm differentiates between the Creator’s timeless standpoint of creation and intelligent creatures’ standpoint of creation:

from the Creator’s standpoint his creation is a timeless whole…. [F]rom the standpoint of an intelligent creature the universe may be thought to be coeternal with God, for there may be no time when the universe is not. For such a creature the universe unfolds as a temporal sequence and because such an agent is in time, he is able to represent the universe as having a past, a present and a future.\textsuperscript{164}

Thus from the creaturely standpoint creation may be said to consist in an objective past, present, and future. In other words from the creaturely standpoint ‘God’s creation is continuously unfolding…(God is) continuously creating the universe, in that more universe has unfolded today than had yesterday, for the present builds on and is made intelligible by the past.\textsuperscript{165} According to this description, it may appear from our creaturely standpoint that the universe is tensed (i.e., that time is dynamic in nature). Helm was unequivocal, however, in affirming the static nature of time. The divine standpoint, on the other hand, because of God’s immutability, cannot perceive of creation in such successive terms. So, from the divine standpoint ‘what is created is one

\textsuperscript{162} ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 58.
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{Eternal God}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{164} ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 55.
\textsuperscript{165} ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 57.
temporally extended or ordered universe."\textsuperscript{166} Helm explains that from our creaturely understanding of the world, we may ‘fitfully strive to attain’ God’s standpoint, ‘insofar as we accurately discern it.’\textsuperscript{167} Given the intuition that there is a fact of the matter regarding whether creation is successively unfolding or not (in other words, the respective standpoints posit conflicting ontological characterizations of the universe), the question remains: which standpoint perceives creation accurately?\textsuperscript{168}

2.4 Contemporary Proponents of Divine Temporality

Following Duns Scotus, Ockham, and Molina, a number of contemporary philosophical theologians have argued against the atemporalist position. Questioning both the motivations for and implications of the traditional view, they have argued instead that God has chosen to experience temporal passage. Preeminent among these is Richard Swinburne, William Hasker, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. In developing and defending

\textsuperscript{166} ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 57.
\textsuperscript{167} ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 57.

\textsuperscript{168} It is beyond the scope of this thesis fully to develop this criticism of Helm’s view, so I refer readers to the discussion found in God & Time: Four Views, pp. 63-91. It is difficult to see, as was discussed in the previous chapter, how two metaphysically contradictory accounts of reality—one the one hand, that all of temporal reality is equally real and spread out before God like the points of space and, on the other hand, that all of temporal reality is not equally real (co-existent, if you like) but only becomes existent successively—can both be accurate descriptions of reality. It cannot be overemphasized that these are not merely conflicting metaphysical conceptions, they \textit{contradict} one another. Helm does seem at one point to agree that one cannot combine the atemporalist view (with it’s commitment to the B-theory of time) with the A-theory of time, on pain of metaphysical contradiction: ‘efforts to combine eternalism in God with temporality in his relation to his temporal creation do not seem very convincing. But for a consistent B-theorist \textit{this project need not be undertaken in the first place}; indeed it ought to be studiously avoided’ (‘Response to William Lane Craig: Paul Helm,’ pp. 161-162, emphasis added). However, in response to the objection that it is inconsistent to affirm the B-theory of time \textit{as well as} the A-theory (as Helm’s doctrine of the two standpoints does), Helm writes, ‘it is evident that it is perfectly consistent with the B-theory of time that agents employ temporal indexicals in their action on and reaction to the world. This represents and expresses their temporal standpoint. B-theorists proceed to affirm that this is not, ontologically speaking, the most basic standpoint, but nonetheless they recognize that the use of temporal indexical language is vital for the agency of someone who is in time’ (‘Response to Critics: Paul Helm,’ pp. 83-84). The essential distinction between epistemology (one’s perception of temporal reality) versus ontology (the way temporal reality \textit{actually} is, independent of anyone’s perceptions) must be borne in mind, however, so that even if one grants Helm’s epistemological distinction between the perception of the Creator and that of the creatures, the metaphysical question of whether temporal reality is \textit{actually} this way or that remains. This issue is further discussed in section 3.3.1 in the following chapter.
accidental temporalism, William Lane Craig has interacted extensively with each of these.

2.4.1 Richard Swinburne

Richard Swinburne is Emeritus Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at the University of Oxford, where he is a Fellow of Oriel College. Swinburne’s contribution to the God and time debate is particularly interesting because though he once ardently defended atemporalism, Swinburne now conceives of God as within time.\(^{169}\) In making his case for the temporality of God, Swinburne deploys a two-pronged strategy: he argues first from God’s personhood to his temporality, and then from the dynamic nature of time to God’s temporality.\(^ {170}\) A rather detailed consideration of Swinburne’s view of the nature of time shall be undertaken in chapter four, so I shall focus here upon his former argument.

As we have seen, the atemporalist tradition beginning with Boethius has rested the fullness and perfection of God’s life largely upon His being timeless. Swinburne, however, sees temporality as no threat to such life. The view of God as possessing ‘total immutability,’ he claims pace Aquinas, does not guarantee God’s timelessness: ‘A totally immutable thing could just go on existing forever without being timeless—especially if other things, such as the universe, changed, while the immutable thing continued changeless. The change of other things would measure the passage of time.


during which the immutable thing changed not.\textsuperscript{171} Besides, he explains, the imperfections that seem implied by temporal existence—for example growing weaker with age, the approach of death, the lackluster quality new experiences assume with the passage of time, etc.—do not assail the life of an omniscient, omnipotent being.\textsuperscript{172}

Swinburne continues his case by drawing out explicitly an implication of the atemporal view at which Scotus and Ockham merely hinted:

God’s timelessness is said to consist in his existing at all moments of human time—simultaneously. Thus he is said to be simultaneously present at...what I did yesterday, what I am doing today, and what I will do tomorrow. But if \( t_1 \) is simultaneous with \( t_2 \) and \( t_2 \) with \( t_3 \), then \( t_1 \) is simultaneous with \( t_3 \). So if the instant at which God knows these things were simultaneous with both yesterday, today, and tomorrow, then these days would be simultaneous with each other.\textsuperscript{173}

It may be objected that this argument is simplistic, since ‘simultaneously’ is a temporal term and the atemporalists’ claim is that God is outside of time and thus not ‘simultaneous with both yesterday, today, and tomorrow.’ But this riposte overlooks the traditional atemporalist definition of ‘eternity’ as ‘the whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life’ (my emphasis). God’s acting in creation demands some notion of simultaneity between the divine eternity and created time, as Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann—both committed atemporalists—argue:

What really interests us...[is] a simultaneity relationship between two relata of which one is eternal and the other temporal. We have to be able to characterize such a relationship coherently if we are to be able to claim that there is any connection between an eternal and a temporal entity or event. An eternal entity or event cannot be earlier or later than, or past or future with respect to, any temporal entity or event. If there is to be any

\textsuperscript{171} The Coherence of Theism, p. 226. Swinburne sees no good reason to conceive God’s immutability in terms of ‘total immutability’ (as Helm does).

\textsuperscript{172} The Coherence of Theism, p. 227.

\textsuperscript{173} The Coherence of Theism, p. 228.
relationship between what is eternal and what is temporal, then, it must be
some species of simultaneity.\textsuperscript{174} Atemporalists—most atemporalists, at any rate—therefore seek to offer a coherent, non-
temporal notion of simultaneity. Swinburne’s argument involving a temporal
‘simultaneous’ is thus meant to introduce a difficulty for atemporalists: either offer a
coherent, non-temporal notion of simultaneity, or accept the implication of temporal
simultaneity.

By way of rejoinder, it may be suggested that perhaps atemporalists ought to
conceive of the temporal term ‘simultaneous’ as a description of an experience exclusive
to divine atemporal existence, and that this places the notion beyond our descriptive
ability. Thus the atemporalist might just as well jettison ‘simultaneous’ in favor of an
alternate term, thereby sidestepping the problem altogether. This suggestion, however,
does not remove the difficulty. If this divine experience is truly beyond our descriptive
ability, then assigning it the label ‘simultaneous’ seems unhelpful (i.e., ‘simultaneous’ is
rendered explanatorily spurious). The same would be true of whatever alternate term was
chosen, if the notion be truly beyond our ken. Of course, atemporalists are free to refine
Boethius’ definition of ‘eternity’ as they may see fit, but it is well beyond the purposes of
this thesis to assist them in such a program of redefinition.

At any rate, Swinburne thinks the argument is hopelessly false—yesterday is not
the same as tomorrow. Therefore, he argues, God cannot be simultaneously present at all
times. In other words, He cannot be atemporal. Besides, Swinburne continues, God, being
a person, performs actions; God continuously interacts with men. For example, Christians

\textsuperscript{174} ‘Eternity,’ Journal of Philosophy 78 [1981]: 226, my emphasis.
believe that God forgives people. But it seems natural to ask when He does so. It seems that if God, at a given time, forgives Jones for having taken a bribe, then it must follow that Jones took the bribe (temporally) prior to God’s forgiving him. If this is so, Swinburne argues, then (barring some untenably analogical sense of the word ‘forgive’) God’s actions are tensed, which implies that He is temporal. Otherwise, God’s forgiving Jones and Jones’s accepting the bribe would be simultaneous is some mysterious non-temporal sense. Thus Swinburne rejects as incoherent the atemporalists’ explanation that God’s actions to forgive, for example, are timeless but have their effects within time.

2.4.2 William Hasker

William Hasker is Professor of Philosophy at Huntington College. Well known for his defense of openness theology, Hasker is also a formidable defender of the temporal understanding of God. Hasker begins by pressing three main criticisms of the atemporal view: ‘that the doctrine of divine timelessness is not taught in the Bible,’ that ‘the biblical writers undeniably do present God as living, acting and reacting in time,’ and that ‘it is very hard to make clear logical sense of the doctrine [of divine timelessness].’ Such criticisms, as we have seen, are not unique to Hasker. Hasker’s primary objection to atemporalism involves the coherence of claiming that an atemporal being can be present and active within creation, as Scripture portrays the Christian God.


177 Though Hasker’s criticisms of the atemporal view are shared by many contemporary temporalists, it is important to note that the majority of temporalists, including William Lane Craig, are not Open Theists.
Though similar in aim to Swinburne’s criticism, Hasker’s argument takes a slightly different trajectory. As we have seen, atemporalists long have affirmed that God has knowledge of temporal facts, though that knowledge itself is timeless, and that God performs actions with temporal results, though His actions themselves are timeless. Hasker dubs this central claim of atemporalism ‘Anselm’s Barrier’: that ‘God neither exists, nor acts, nor knows in time.’

Focusing on the claim that God has (timeless) knowledge of all temporal reality via divine intuition, what Aquinas called ‘knowledge of vision,’ Hasker argues it is not possible for all of temporal reality to be present to God’s intellect (in timeless eternity) as *temporal reality*. He writes:

1. If God is directly aware of a thing, that thing is metaphysically present to God. (Premise).
2. If God knows temporal beings, God knows all of their temporal stages. (Premise).
3. If God is directly aware of temporal beings, all of their temporal stages are metaphysically present to God. (From 1-2).
4. If the temporal stages of a temporal being are metaphysically present to God, they are present either sequentially or simultaneously. (Premise).
5. If God is timeless, nothing is present to God sequentially. (Premise).
6. If God is timeless and is directly aware of temporal beings, all their temporal stages are simultaneously metaphysically present to God. (From 3-5).
7. If the temporal stages of a temporal being are simultaneously metaphysically present to God, those stages exist simultaneously. (Premise).
8. The temporal stages of a temporal being do not exist simultaneously. (Premise).

If God is timeless, God is not directly aware of temporal beings. (From 6-8).  

Thus the difficulty is that in timeless eternity there can be no temporal succession: there are no distinguishable moments in an atemporal God’s life. Yet all the moments of temporal reality must be somehow present to the ‘all at once’ of timeless eternity, which implies that all the moments of any temporal event, say, the Scottish Enlightenment, are equally present to God; all its ‘moments’ are actually (somehow) simultaneous, not successive. But the having of all one’s moments simultaneously is the distinguishing feature of atemporal existence, not temporality. Therefore the Scottish Enlightenment (and all other putatively temporal entities) are actually timeless, not temporal. Hasker thus rejects Anselm’s Barrier and with it the coherence of the atemporalist view.

After evaluating and rejecting the classical atemporal account of God and time, Hasker presents his own straightforward view. It is Hasker’s contention that God cannot (infallibly) know future free—where freedom is understood in the libertarian sense—human decisions, coupled with an affirmation of the dynamic theory of time, that leads him to believe God is in time. Indeed, according to Hasker, such truths are among those

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180 ‘The Absence of a Timeless God,’ p. 186. Delmas Lewis develops a similar argument (i.e., that given atemporalism temporal things are not only epistemically present to God, but also existentially present to God, insofar as they coexist timelessly in the eternal present) in ‘Eternity, Time, and Tenselessness’ Faith and Philosophy 5 (January 1988): 72-86. Interestingly, Hasker concedes the intelligibility of the atemporalist claim that God timelessly acts to sustain the universe (i.e., His act is timeless with temporal results): ‘just as the nonspatial God can act outside of space so as to produce effects at every point in space, so the timeless God can act outside of time…so as to produce effects at every point of time. And just such an action is God’s preservation in being of the created, temporal world’ (God, Time, and Knowledge, p. 154). In this he is a dissentent from the temporalist camp. Hasker makes clear, however, that this concession is limited to God’s ‘general actions’ of sustaining. God’s responsive acts, he believes, are inexplicable on the atemporalist account.

181 As we have seen, Paul Helm avoids the force of this argument by embracing a tenseless view of time. However, he is something of a dissentent among atemporalists, as the majority of them (past and contemporary) want to preserve a tensed view of time.
which it is not ‘logically possible’ for God to know.\textsuperscript{182} This must be, he argues, because if humans are free then the future must be ‘open,’ that is, unfixed or genuinely contingent.\textsuperscript{183} But given the genuinely open nature of the future, not even God can (infallibly) know it: ‘God in this view cannot…know in advance by direct vision precisely what will occur and \textit{prearrange} concomitant circumstances so as to meet the needs of the occasion.’\textsuperscript{184} According to Hasker the view of humans as genuinely free and divine knowledge are incompatible with atemporalism. So from the reality of human freedom and the lack of God’s inability to (infallibly) know the future, Hasker concludes that God must be in time.

As is the case with many contemporary temporalists, Hasker says little regarding God’s role as the Creator of time. Given his characterization of the temporalist view as the position that ‘God always has existed throughout infinite past time, and…always will exist,’\textsuperscript{185} Hasker seems to imply that there is in fact \textit{not} a beginning to time, for it is difficult to imagine there being a literal first moment of an infinitely old past. Further, if there is no first moment of time, it is difficult to conceive of God as the Creator of time (for on such an understanding time appears to be uncreated). As we will see in the next chapter, Craig strongly objects to the suggestion that time stretches infinitely into the past and that God is therefore not the Creator of time.

\textsuperscript{182} \textit{God, Time, and Knowledge}, p. 73. I shall explore the interplay between divine eternality and open theism in chapter four of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{183} \textit{God, Time, and Knowledge}, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{God, Time, and Knowledge}, p. 192.

2.4.3 Nicholas Wolterstorff

Nicholas Wolterstorff is the Noah Porter Professor of Philosophy at Yale Divinity School. Among his wide-ranging and influential contributions to Christian philosophical theology is his defense of the temporalist conception of God’s eternality. Wolterstorff begins his argument by revealing his ‘deepest motivation’ for affirming the temporalist view: ‘What’s decisive for me is Scripture. No one denies that Scripture applies the terminology of time to God.’ The Bible’s portrayal of God, he claims, is prima facie support for temporalism:

[Scripture’s] representation of God as having a history…is not exceptional but typical of Scripture’s representation of God: God responds to what transpires in human affairs by performing a succession of actions, including actions of speaking…. The God of Scripture is One of whom a narrative can be told; we know that not because Scripture tells us that but because it offers such a narrative. I hold that an implication of this is that God is in time. If something has a history, then perforce that being is in time.

This biblical portrayal, Wolterstorff claims, ought to be taken literally in the absence of overriding reasons to the contrary. In that case, he continues, ‘the burden of proof is on those who hold that God is outside of time….on those who hold that the biblical representation of God, as One who has a history that can be narrated is not to be taken as the literal truth of the matter.’


188 Wolterstorff, ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 188.

189 ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ pp. 188-189. The most common overriding reason offered by atemporalists—that God is utterly immutable—is considered and rejected by Wolterstorff (op. cit., p. 190-193).
Beyond this *prima facie* case Wolterstorff reasons that, given the tensed nature of time (i.e., that it is not the case that the past, present, and future exist on an ontological par), God must be temporal. This is because, he argues, the tenseless view of reality robs one of the ability to determine what is happening ‘now’ and with it the ability to act and respond intentionally. On the tenseless view, events are spread out through time in the way objects are spread out through space, so that ‘of no event is it the case that at a certain time it has the ontological status of occurring and then at a later time the different ontological status of having occurred.’\textsuperscript{190} The event of Luther nailing his theses to the Wittenberg door on 31 October 1517 is every bit as real as some event’s occurring on 31 October 2017. The former is *past* from the standpoint of the latter, and the latter is *future* from the standpoint of the former, but these relations are purely *ad hoc* depending upon one’s standpoint. When we refer indexically to some event—that is, when we locate some event in relation to *now*—however, such *ad hoc* relations are useless. The use of temporal indexicals demands awareness of when it is *now*. To illustrate this point, Wolterstorff offers the example of deciding to turn on the radio to hear the one o’clock news.\textsuperscript{191} Clearly, in order to hear the news, one must turn the radio on at one o’clock; one must act when one o’clock is *now*. But therein lies the difficulty, Wolterstorff continues, for this demands one’s ability to determine which date is *now*.

The tenseless theorist, for whom all dates and events have exactly the same ontological status, has no way of accounting for how we make that determination [of which date is *now*]. If all events…have exactly the same ontological status, how do I get started in implementing my decision that my *present* act of turning on this radio shall coincide with this *present* event of its becoming one o’clock…?\textsuperscript{192}

\textsuperscript{190} ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 197.
\textsuperscript{191} ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 201.
\textsuperscript{192} ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 201.
Wolterstorff concludes, therefore, that since this cannot be done the tenseless view of time does not accurately reflect temporal reality.

Wolterstorff next explores the notion of being ‘outside time.’ While events are doubtlessly within time, he thinks it is less obvious whether nonevents such as human beings, animals, and properties are, as well.\textsuperscript{193} A nonevent such as his cat, Wolterstorff explains, has a history of events which occurred in time. Nonevents such as numbers, on the other hand, have no such history; they neither began to exist nor shall they cease to exist. In order to determine whether some nonevent is in time, Wolterstorff proposes we ‘take whether or not something has a history as the determinant factor.’\textsuperscript{194}

We have already seen that Wolterstorff reads Scripture as portraying God as having a history. For example, ‘after hearing the Hebrews’ cry of suffering, God addressed Moses out of an unburnt flaming bush and, upon being asked for his name, told Moses he was to be called I AM.’\textsuperscript{195} Atemporalists, of course, acknowledge such portrayals but deny that they constitute a history for God. Atemporalists have traditionally taken recourse in the familiar distinction between God’s (timelessly) eternal action, on the one hand, and the temporal results of that action, on the other. But according to Wolterstorff this raises a certain difficulty: according to the Christian tradition, God must know all tensed facts (including those involving knowledge of the ‘now’). From his earlier conclusion that human actions involve tensed facts, it follows that in virtue of knowing human actions God knows tensed facts. Moreover, if God responds to humans, He must again have knowledge of the now: ‘one can know that some

\textsuperscript{194} ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 203.
\textsuperscript{195} ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 203.
event is presently happening only when it is; the knowledge that some event is occurring can occur only when that event itself is occurring.\textsuperscript{196} It follows from God’s knowledge of such facts that there is change in God’s knowledge: ‘since these facts come and go, God’s knowledge of them comes and goes. That’s why, if God has knowledge of tensed facts, God has a history; there’s a story to be told about God’s knowledge.\textsuperscript{197} Therefore, God has a history, which entails that He exists in time.

As was the case with Hasker, Wolterstorff says precious little regarding God’s role as the Creator of time. He writes, regarding the question of whether time is God’s creation, ‘on this issue I’m inclined to be an ontological minimalist…and to plead, “I don’t know”.\textsuperscript{198} He concedes the intelligibility of the claim that time has a first moment and that time is created by God, but Wolterstorff claims not to ‘discern any substantive arguments for the conclusion that time is not an intrinsic feature of the divine life.’\textsuperscript{199} Unfortunately Wolterstorff leaves us to speculate on how he might reconcile these seemingly incompatible claims. If time is simply an intrinsic feature of God’s life, in what sense does God ‘create’ time? Does God somehow create an intrinsic feature of His own life? Is ‘time’ being used in multiple senses? While he leaves such questions unasked and unanswered, Wolterstorff is clear that he is ‘incapable of adjudicating the dispute’ over whether or not time is God’s creation.\textsuperscript{200} As we shall see, once again, this difficulty of the temporalist view plays a central role in Craig’s development of accidental temporalism.

\textsuperscript{196} ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 206.
\textsuperscript{197} ‘Unqualified Divine Temporality,’ p. 206.
\textsuperscript{198} Wolterstorff, ‘Response to Critics,’ p. 233.
\textsuperscript{199} ‘Response to Critics,’ p. 237.
\textsuperscript{200} ‘Response to Critics,’ p. 238.
2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the debate over God’s relationship to time within the Christian philosophical theological tradition from its entrance into that tradition with Augustine through its development into the late medieval era. The notion of timelessly eternal existence, long familiar to neo-Platonists as the mode of existence possessed by Being itself, was introduced into Christian thought by Origen—but it was Augustine who offered the first sustained consideration of time and God’s relation to time within Christendom. Strongly echoing the neo-Platonist Plotinus, Augustine argued that God’s nature is metaphysically simple. Thus God not only does not, but indeed cannot change in any way; God is utterly immutable. God’s mode of existence, therefore, must be devoid of any change or succession. Augustine concluded that such timeless existence must consist in an ‘eternal present’ where ‘nothing is transient, but the whole is present.’ However, having previously concluded that neither the past nor the future exist, his analysis presented a difficulty: how can God know future events? Though he affirmed that God must have knowledge of ‘what does not exist,’ Augustine confessed he could not resolve how this is so.

Due principally to the enormous influence of neo-Platonism in general and Augustine in particular, the conception of God as metaphysically simple and existing in an ‘eternal present’ became assimilated into the Christian philosophical theological tradition. This view dominated the tradition from Boethius, through Anselm, and culminated in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Along the way tension arose between the notions of God’s ‘eternal present’ and the ontological distinction between the past, present, and future. It was recognized, as Anselm put it, that eternity must have ‘its own
unique simultaneity’ in order for God to be ‘present’ in creation without experiencing succession. Yet in order to maintain God’s eternity alongside His ‘knowledge of vision’ of all things past, present, and future ‘as being present to it,’ the view of all times as existing on an ontological par seems implicitly affirmed by atemporalism. However, some contemporary defenders of atemporalism, notably Brian Leftow and Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, have argued their view’s compatibility with the dynamic conception of time. As we have seen, though, these attempts implicitly assume the view of time as static. The notable contemporary dissentient is Paul Helm, who recognizes the indispensability of the static view of time for atemporalism.

As attention narrowed on the question of God’s knowledge of future contingents, the importance of the metaphysical nature of time became clearer. Beginning with Duns Scotus and continuing with Ockham and Molina, the view of all times as co-existing on an ontological par came to be rejected in favor of an ontological distinction between past, present, and future. States of affairs are instantiated successively; times successively come into existence (the process later called ‘temporal becoming’). This emerging emphasis on the metaphysical nature of time has developed into a key determining factor in the contemporary debate. Indeed, William Lane Craig regards this emergence as a watershed in the debate over God’s relation to time and (as we shall see) makes considerable effort to defend the dynamic theory of time. With this development came the realization that an ‘eternal present’ could not be present to any non-existent time. Thus the atemporalist view was called into question, and the view of God as existing within time emerged as a viable alternative to atemporalism. Following Scotus, temporalist views of God have been heavily favored among contemporary (that is, post-
World War II) Christian philosophical theologians, preeminent among whom are Richard Swinburne, William Hasker, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. While it seems generally agreed that atemporalism is a coherent position given the static view of time, contemporary temporalists argue from (among other things) the dynamic nature of time to God’s temporality.

The historical survey of this chapter thus sets the stage for William Lane Craig’s own proposed scheme for understanding divine eternality. As we have seen, both the atemporalist and temporalist views face certain perennial difficulties, particularly those involving the nature of time. The atemporalist view faltered largely as a result of its commitment to the eternal co-existence on an ontological par of all times and events. Though seemingly avoiding the difficulties of atemporalism, the temporalist view threatens God’s status as the Creator of time by positing an infinite past. These difficulties gave rise to the development of Craig’s accidental temporalist view. Craig does not completely reject either of the traditional views. Rather, in effect he preserves the strengths of each—a timeless understanding of God sans time, a temporal understanding of God in relation to the temporal creation.

With this historical context in hand, I turn in chapter three to offer an exposition of William Lane Craig’s own contribution to the debate over God’s relation to time: accidental temporalism. This will include, firstly, a consideration of Craig’s relevant philosophical commitments especially regarding the dynamic (tensed) versus static (tenseless) views of time and the various arguments that buttress them. I shall then explicate the claim that God is ‘timeless sans creation’ and ‘temporal subsequent to creation.’
CHAPTER 3:
William Lane Craig on Divine Eternity

3.1 Introduction

Having established in the previous chapter a philosophical and theological context for the God and time discussion, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce William Lane Craig and explicate his scheme for conceiving God’s relation to time: accidental temporalism. Though the central claims of Craig’s view have received a modicum of attention amongst academics (as we shall see in the subsequent chapters), to my knowledge the present chapter is the first systematic presentation of the development of accidental temporalism. After introducing Craig, I shall trace the development of his accidental temporalist view from its origin in Craig’s research on cosmological arguments (particularly the medieval Arabic version called the kalām). According to Craig an important implication of such arguments is that the past series of temporal events cannot constitute an actual infinite. Time, therefore, must have had an absolute beginning. This conclusion leads to a presentation of Craig’s own important contributions to the philosophy of time itself, which I couch in terms of John McTaggart’s distinction between two ways of ordering time, which yields the ‘static’ and ‘dynamic’ theories of time. Since the early twentieth century, McTaggart’s distinction and terminology have been the widely adopted framework for discussions in the philosophy of time. As Richard Gale observes, one can detect in these discussions ‘a common underlying concern: almost
all of them are attempting to answer McTaggart’s paradox.\footnote{Richard Gale, ‘The Static Versus the Dynamic Temporal,’ in The Philosophy of Time: A Collection of Essays, ed. Richard Gale (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), p. 65.} Indeed, though McTaggart is not always explicitly referenced, ‘the problems (these modern philosophers) wrestled with were those bequeathed to them by McTaggart.’\footnote{‘The Static Versus the Dynamic Temporal,’ p. 65.} This is equally true of Craig, though his concern with the philosophy of time goes beyond that of McTaggart. My consideration of Craig’s views of the nature of time gives rise to an exposition of accidental temporalism, according to which God is timeless \textit{sans} creation and temporal subsequent to the creation of the tensed order.

3.2 Accidental Temporalism Summarized

William Lane Craig agrees with James Barr that ‘if such a thing as a Christian doctrine of time has to be developed, the work of discussing and developing it must belong not to biblical but to philosophical theology.’\footnote{James Barr, Biblical Words for Time (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 149. See chapter one of this thesis for discussion of this claim.} To that end Craig has in recent years argued for a construal of divine eternity according to which God \textit{sans} creation is timeless, but since the creation of the world has been temporal. In other words had God freely refrained from creating the temporal world, His existence would be purely timeless. William Lane Craig is a prominent American philosopher and theologian well known for his wide contributions to Christian scholarship, which emphasize Jesus studies, philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, and the philosophy of time. After completing graduate studies (M.A. in Philosophy of Religion; M.A. in History of Christian Thought) at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the mid-1970’s, Craig pursued research on the cosmological argument for God’s existence under the direction
of Professor John Hick at the University of Birmingham, research which earned Craig the PhD in philosophy (1977) and culminated in the publication of his *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* and *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*.4

Though the question of time and God’s relation to time was not at the fore of Craig’s mind during these years, it was a question with which he had long wrestled.5 As an undergraduate Craig underwent a brief flirtation with Kierkegaardian fideism, a notion stemming from Søren Kierkegaard’s insistence that the true allure—indeed, the very heart—of Christianity is its affirmation of ‘the absurd,’ namely, that the Eternal became temporal in the Incarnation.6 Building on his pivotal conception of faith, namely, that ‘there is here the certainty that, viewed objectively, it is the absurd, and this absurdity, held fast in the passion of inwardness, is faith,’

Kierkegaard confirmed that

> [t]he absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being.

Kierkegaard, of course, warmly embraced this absurdity, though largely in isolation from mainstream Christianity, as most Christians, including Craig, have been reluctant to conceive of religious conviction as entailing the suspension of reason or as embracing

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5 Private interview with Dr. Craig, 17 November 2009.

6 For the sake of clarity one must bear in mind that, according to Kierkegaard, ‘not every absurdity is the absurd or the paradox.’ In an 1850 journal entry Kierkegaard explains: ‘The absurd, the paradox, is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense; no, it is a symbol, a riddle, a compound riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense’ (*Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by H. V. and E. H. Hong [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967], p. 5).

irrationality. While his fideist coquetries were short lived, Craig remained troubled by Kierkegaard’s puzzle: how could the Eternal, in the event of the Incarnation, enter into time? As has been the case for doctoral students everywhere, though, Craig was forced upon matriculation at Birmingham to shuffle this and related questions to the back of his mind.

Craig’s research at Birmingham focused on a family of arguments for God’s existence known as the ‘cosmological’ arguments, with particular emphasis on a medieval Arabic version of the argument. Cosmological arguments reason from the contingency of the cosmos to a First Cause or Sufficient Reason for the existence of the cosmos. As with the medieval Christian scholars, neither the nature of time nor God’s relation to time were presenting issues for the medieval Muslim scholars. Rather, having inherited Aristotelian thought through unmistakably Neo-Platonist translations, the

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Muslim scholars were concerned both to demonstrate God’s existence and refute the ancient claim of the eternity of the world.\(^\text{10}\)

From among the various Arabic cosmological arguments that emerged during this period, two versions stand out. From the so-called falsafa school of Islamic philosophy, which understood God as the being whose essence and existence are indistinct, leading them to embrace the Neo-Platonic theory that the cosmos emanates from God, came the ‘contingency’ version of the argument.\(^\text{11}\) The falsafa cosmological argument is straightforward: having argued for the distinction between a thing’s essence and its existence, they reasoned that all things in which such a distinction inheres (possible beings) require for their existence an efficient cause\(^\text{12}\) in which there is no such distinction (necessary being). It is interesting to note that though Aquinas is commonly credited with originating the contingency version of the cosmological argument—indeed, it is popularly known as the ‘Thomistic’ cosmological argument—we find it defended hundreds of years earlier in the writings of, for example, Anū Nasr Muhammed ibn Muhammed ibn Tarkān ibn Awzalagh al-Fārābī (c.870 – 950; customarily called simply Al-Fārābī) and Abū ‘Alī al-Husain ibn Sīnā (c.980 – 1037; known in the Latin West as


\(^{11}\) Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, p. 58ff (and sources cited therein). It is interesting to note that Aquinas agreed that God’s essence is His existence, but he would reject divine emanation.

\(^{12}\) In his natural philosophy, Aristotle distinguished between four kinds of causality (*Physics* II.3; in Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. and trans. by Robin Waterfield [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996]; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.2). These are the *material cause* (i.e., ‘that from which a thing is made and continues to be made’), the *formal cause* (i.e., ‘the formula for what a thing is’—it’s form), the *efficient cause* (i.e., ‘the original source of change or rest’), and the *final cause* (i.e., ‘the end’ or ‘purpose’ of a thing). These distinctions are commonly illustrated by imagining a bronze statue: the bronze itself is the statue’s material cause, the shape or image into which the bronze is fashioned is the statue’s formal cause, the producer or sculptor (viz., the one initiating change in the bronze) is the efficient cause of the statue, and the final cause of the statue may be, for example, the sake of beauty or inspiration.
As Craig observes: ‘We may credit the Arabic philosophers with the origin of the modern cosmological argument based on contingency. For though Aristotle hinted at it and the *mutakallimūn* called the world contingent…it was the Arabic philosophers who spelled out the distinction between necessary and possible being on the basis of essence/existence distinction.’

Aquinas, of course, knew this well. Indeed, his indebtedness to the Arabic tradition, and Avicenna in particular, is easily detected, for example, in the former’s *On Being and Essence*.

The *mutakallimūn*, or medieval Arabic practitioners of scholastic theology, of the so-called *kalām* school formulated a version of the cosmological argument that seeks to demonstrate the beginning of the universe in time. Whereas the *falsafa* arguments established the ontological dependence of the cosmos upon God, they nevertheless allowed for its co-eternity with Him. Insisting instead that the universe was created *ex nihilo*, Abu Hāmid Muhammad ibn Ta’ūs Ahmad al-Tūsī al-Shāfi’i (1058 – 1111; generally known as Al-Ghāzalī) and the *kalām* school, following their forerunner, Abū Yusuf Yaʿqūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (c.801 – 873; customarily called simply Al-Kindī), argued for a beginning of the universe in time which entailed the existence of God. The strength of their arguments turned on the impossibility of infinite time. So Al-Kindī, for example, argued via *reductio ad absurdum* that if we imagine time to be infinite, then

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14 Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, p. 17.

15 Jon McGinnis surveys this indebtedness in his *Avicenna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 252f. It is worth mentioning that Aquinas is indebted in a similar way to the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, as well (see Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2.1).

16 I shall have more to say about this in the context of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in chapter five of this thesis.
each period of time would be preceded by another such period infinitely, such that an
initial period could never be obtained. But if an initial period can never be obtained, then,
given the impossibility of traversing an infinite, from what point does one commence in
order to reach the present day? He insists ‘time is quantitative, and it is impossible that
time have infinity in actuality, time having a finite beginning.’ For his part Al-Ghāzalī,
building on the work of Al-Kindī, makes considerable effort to demonstrate the
absurdities of infinite time.

Until Craig dusted them off, the Arabic contributions in this arena lay largely
forgotten by Western philosophers in the shadow of post-Kantian concerns. Whether they
were forgotten due to the withering attacks on philosophy by Al-Ghāzalī and its
subsequent marginalization by the mutakallimūn, the tendency of the largely Christian
West to focus primarily on other Western Christian thinkers, or because the synthesizing
nature of Aquinas’ work provided a single source for much of the Arabic contributions, is
difficult to say. Regardless, in order to grasp how Craig’s research of the Arabic
cosmological arguments thrust the question of God and time to the center of Craig’s
thought, it will prove helpful to briefly sketch that project.

The version of the cosmological argument which Craig dubbed the kalām
(derived from the Arabic term for ‘speech,’ which came to denote the statement of points
of theology) can be stated as a simple syllogism:

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17 See Abū Rida, Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafiyah (Cairo: 1953), cited in Fakhry, A History of Islamic
Philosophy, p. 75, where Al-Kindī’s argument is located within the broad context of his thought. Al-
Kindī’s thought here is similar to that of Ockham, who notes that ‘if the world had been made from
eternity, then infinities would have been traversed’ (William of Ockham, Quodlibetal Questions, vol. 1,
18 Quoted in Craig, The Kalām Cosmological Argument, p. 28.
19 These arguments are summarized in Craig, The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz, pp. 99-
103; cf. Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp. 222-226.
(1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.
(2) The universe began to exist.
(3) Therefore the universe has a cause of its existence.\(^{20}\)

Without launching into a full evaluation of this argument, it is noteworthy that Craig appeals both to philosophical and scientific support for his premises.\(^{21}\) We are here, however, interested only in his philosophical support of premise (2), which begins with an argument that an actual infinite cannot exist in the real world (though such a notion may prove consistent and useful in the ‘purely mental realm’ of, say, mathematics).\(^{22}\) It is generally agreed, for example, that within the purely theoretical realm of mathematics the set of natural numbers \((1, 2, 3, 4, 5...\)) is an actual infinite. It is reasonable to ask what is the cardinality (i.e., the number or amount of members) of this set? Realizing that no natural number can denote this cardinality (because there is no ‘infinitieth’ number), mathematicians have adopted the symbol \(\aleph_0\) as such a set’s cardinal number. As is the case with employing the notion of imaginary numbers (that is, multiples of the square root of negative one), the notion of the actual infinite may well yield mathematically fruitful results. Attempting to apply this notion to the actual world, however, gives rise to certain absurdities.

This is evident, Craig argues, when one attempts to perform inverse operations on transfinite numbers (e.g., subtracting infinity from infinity yields conflicting answers: zero and infinity). To illustrate the absurd implications of affirming the existence in

\(^{20}\) Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, p. 63. Craig’s formulation is nearly identical with that of Al-Ghazzali (Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, pp. 103-104).

\(^{21}\) For the latter see Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, pp. 110-140.

\(^{22}\) *Kalam Cosmological Argument*, pp. 69f. Craig notes that though contemporary mathematicians are wont to speak of this or that set, including infinite sets, as *existing*, ‘when…the existence of an infinite set is postulated, no true existential import is carried by the statement, and no verdict is pronounced on whether such a collection could really exist at all’ (*Kalam Cosmological Argument*, p. 71).
reality of an actual infinite, Craig appeals to Hilbert’s Hotel, the famous illustration of the

great German mathematician David Hilbert:

Let us imagine a hotel with a finite number of rooms, and let us assume that all the rooms are occupied. When a new guest arrives and requests a room, the proprietor apologises, ‘Sorry—all the rooms are full.’ Now let us imagine a hotel with an infinite number of rooms, and let us assume that again all the rooms are occupied. But this time, when a new guest arrives and asks for a room, the proprietor claims, ‘But of course!’ and shifts the person in room 1 to room 2, the person in room 2 to room 3, the person in room 3 to room 4, and so on… The new guest then moves into room 1, which has now become vacant as a result of these transpositions. But now let us suppose an infinite number of new guests arrive, asking for rooms. ‘Certainly, certainly!’ says the proprietor, and he proceeds to move the person in room 1 into room 2, the person in room 2 into room 4, and the person in room 3 into room 6, the person in room 4 into 8, and so on… In this way, all the odd-numbered rooms become free, and the infinity of new guests can easily be accommodated in them.23

Despite the fact that prior to the rearrangement of the guests every one of the hotel’s rooms were occupied, the additional guests—indeed, infinitely many additional guests—are given accommodations! Further, even though infinitely many additional guests have arrived, the number of guests in the hotel remains unchanged (i.e., the number of guests remains infinity). Suppose that a week later a number of guests, say 12, decide to check out. Despite appearances, the hotel’s occupancy would be no less than before, because infinity minus 12 remains infinity! Indeed, subtracting infinity from infinity yields contradictory answers: zero and infinity. The self-satisfied proprietor, thinking his

23 Kalām Cosmological Argument, pp. 84-85. That Hilbert’s Hotel is intended to illustrate the logical absurdities derived from positing an actual infinite in reality is sometimes misunderstood. Jordan Howard Sobel, for example, dismisses the illustration thusly: ‘Difficulties with the hotel are practical and physical. Where could it be? Where is there room for it? Of what could it be made? Vast forests would be needed to build it of wood. Really big ones if its rooms are of one size. How much time would be needed for all of the room changes required to accommodate infinitely many new guests to take place? Would not some need to be to rooms very far removed from guests’ old rooms? Such questions invite science fiction responses, which is to say they bring out the physical impossibility of this particular infinity of concurrent real things, not its logical impossibility’ (Logic and Theism: Arguments for and Against Beliefs in God [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], p. 187).
business model rather clever, fails to realize the difference between the potential and the actual infinite. According to Craig, potential infinites are infinite not in any determinate sense, but merely in the sense that we could ceaselessly go on counting them, regardless of how much time one spends counting, never reaching the end (imagine counting for years: ‘one, two, three…infinity!’ Impossible!). Actual infinites, however, are determinate totalities. Even if there is some definite fact of the matter regarding how many rooms the hotel contains, we cannot by constructing additional rooms increase the hotel’s occupancy! For notice: though such construction would doubtlessly increase the hotel’s occupancy, the cardinality of the set of rooms before new construction and the cardinality of the set of rooms after construction is the same—infinity! Now, were his hotel outfitted with a potentially infinite number of rooms, the proprietor’s plan would be brilliant (provided the guests don’t mind waiting while new rooms are added). An actually infinite number of rooms, however, is impossible. The same goes for any actual infinite in reality. Thus Hilbert’s Hotel serves to illustrate the absurdity of the actual infinite’s existence in reality.\(^\text{25}\)

Craig next argues that an infinite temporal regress of events would be an actual infinite: ‘if the series or sequence of changes in time is infinite, then these events

\(^{24}\) Platonists (at least a great many Platonists) disagree, insisting that sets are actual infinites, such as an actually infinite number of abstract entities (because they have fixed membership). The set of all natural numbers, for example, is regarded as both infinite and existing. Pace Craig, such Platonists maintain that mathematical or abstract entities are simply different in relevant ways from physical objects such as hotel rooms. It is worth noting, however, that the kalām argument is defensible on a Platonist understanding of universals (such as sets). See, for example, J. P. Moreland’s ‘A Response to a Platonistic and to a Set-theoretic Objection to the Kalam Cosmological Argument,’ in Religious Studies 39 (2003): 373-390 and R. Douglas Geivett, ‘The Kalam Cosmological Argument,’ in To Everyone An Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview, eds. J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, and Francis J. Beckwith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

\(^{25}\) Cf. David Hilbert, according to whom ‘the [actual] infinite is nowhere to be found in reality…The role that remains for the infinite to play is solely that of an idea’ (‘On the Infinite,’ in Philosophy of Mathematics, ed. Paul Benacerraf and Hilary Putnam [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964], p. 151).
considered collectively constitute an actual infinite.'\textsuperscript{26} Now, history (the collection of prior events) is a determinate collection, that is, a set of discrete events which stretches back into the past. Moreover, as members of the set of prior events these temporal events are or have been actual; they have occurred in reality. This means that if history (from any point) comprises an infinite collection of temporal events (e.g., days or years), then that collection will be an actual infinite.\textsuperscript{27} It follows, then, that the notion of history as an actually infinite collection of past events is logically absurd. In other words, the past collection of temporal events cannot be actually infinite; it must have had a beginning at some point in the finite past. It is this implication of the actual infinite that plays a foundational role in Craig’s accidental temporalism. An endless series of discrete events (e.g., the future) is relevantly different in that such a series would be merely potentially infinite.

However, not all philosophers have accepted Craig’s conclusions regarding the absurdity of an actual infinite. University of Colorado philosopher Wes Morriston, for example, objects that ‘if [Craig’s] main line of argument…against the possibility of an actual infinite worked as advertised, it could be employed with equal force to show that an endless series of events is also metaphysically impossible.’\textsuperscript{28} But given the generally accepted metaphysical possibility of an endless series of discrete events, Craig’s reasoning about the metaphysical impossibility of a beginningless series of discrete events must be faulty. To demonstrate this, Morriston proposes a thought experiment that

\textsuperscript{26} Craig, \textit{The Kalam Cosmological Argument}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{27} It is worth noting that the picture changes a bit when one turns to consider the set of all events from any point into the future, as such a collection is necessarily a potential infinite (cf. \textit{The Kalam Cosmological Argument}, p. 97).

purports to establish that a beginningless series of past events and an endless series of future events are ‘similar in all relevant respects’ such that we must reject or accept the metaphysical possibility of each in tandem.29

The proposed experiment runs as follows: imagine two scenarios in which Gabriel and Uriel alternate saying praises to God for one minute apiece. In the first scenario, Gabriel and Uriel have been alternating throughout a beginningless past. In the second scenario, Gabriel and Uriel begin alternating and will do so forever. Whereas Craig would accept the possibility of the latter, he would reject the former as a metaphysically impossible actual infinite. But according to Morriston, this is too hasty, for it seems the query ‘How many distinct praises will be said?’ must yield the awkward response ‘infinitely many.’30 Morriston explains:

[L]et me be perfectly clear. When I ask, How many praises will be said?, I am not asking, How many will have occurred when all the praises have been said? The answer to the two questions must be the same if, as would be the case for any finite series of praises, the series will be completed. But in the case of an endless…series, the answers must be different.31

The idea seems to be that these difficulties correlate with those Craig raises regarding beginningless series of events. By attempting to force Craig to concede that, after any given moment in an endless series of events, an infinite number of praises will be said, Morriston is accusing Craig of inconsistency in accepting an infinite in scenario two but not scenario one. What gives this accusation bite is Morriston’s implicit claim that both scenarios are properly characterized as actual infinites. If Morriston is correct that an

30 ‘Beginningless Past, Endless Future, and the Actual Infinite,’ 443 (italics his).
endless series of events (which Craig agrees is metaphysically possible) indicates the coherence of an actual infinite, then Craig’s motivation for proposing accidental temporalism is severely threatened.

In order to demonstrate that his second scenario involves an actual infinite, Morriston makes considerable effort to establish that the members of the endless series of future events comprise a determinate totality.\(^\text{32}\) In other words, he must establish that Craig’s characterization of such a series as a merely potential infinite is inaccurate. Morriston sets about this task in two ways. First, he stipulates in his formulation of scenario two that ‘God has exercised His supreme power in such a way as to make it the case that each praise in the endless series of praises we have envisaged will occur. Each of them is discrete, wholly determinate, and certain to occur because God has determined that it will occur.’\(^\text{33}\) Morriston attempts to persuade us that this is guaranteed by disarmingly appealing to God’s supreme power. Indeed, he insists that

God has determined that each member of the endless series of praises will occur. For any \(n\), praise number \(n\) will be said. There is a completely determinate fact of the matter about when it will be said, by whom, with what words, and in what precise manner. Nothing has been left ‘indefinite’ or ‘indeterminate’.\(^\text{34}\)

But this is to beg the very question at issue: can the endless series envisaged in scenario two really be a determinate totality? Thus Morriston’s question—‘how many “definite

\(^{32}\) In order to make his case, Morriston must show that the endless series of future events is, as David Hilbert puts it, ‘a completed unity…a totality of things which exists all at once’ (‘On the Infinite,’ p. 139.).


\(^{34}\) ‘Beginningless Past, Endless Future, and the Actual Infinite,’ 446.
and discrete” praises will be said after a given moment of time?”—rests upon his insistence that ‘each of [the praises] will be said’.

Morriston correctly assumes that Craig will demur, preferring to hold that an indefinite number of praises will be said. As we have seen, Craig would insist that so long as praises are being added to the set (which on this scenario continues ‘forever,’ by which one must assume Morriston means ‘ceaselessly’) a precise number cannot be affixed to said set. In rejecting this response, Morriston must assume that the set has a definite answer because an omnipotent God has caused (and thus, presuming omniscience, knows) however many praises are to be said, thus giving the endless series of praises the requisite ‘closed’ criterion. In other words, Morriston builds into his scenario precisely what Craig has rejected as impossible: a set containing a determinate whole consisting of an infinite number of actually existing members. Thus Morriston has smuggled into his question precisely what needs to be argued in order to get his desired response of ‘infinitely many.’ Without this presupposition, however, there is no absurdity in holding that Gabriel and Uriel say ‘potentially infinitely many’ praises. Even if an omnipotent and omniscient God determines that the angels, beginning at some point, will alternate saying praises forever, we cannot conclude that the praises in this series numbers (or will number) an actual infinity.

So, having differentiated the actual from the potential infinite and rejected the metaphysical possibility of the former, Craig invites us to suppose, for the sake of argument, that perhaps an actual infinite is metaphysically possible. Even still, he continues, ‘the temporal series of events cannot be one, since an actual infinite cannot be

35 ‘Beginningless Past, Endless Future, and the Actual Infinite,’ 446.
formed by successive addition, as the temporal series of events is. The collection of past temporal events did not simply occur or pop into existence in toto; rather, it was formed by successive addition, events occurring one after the other (hour after hour, day after day, year after year). As with the impossibility of counting the natural numbers through to infinity, so too a temporal series of events formed by successive addition could never arrive at infinity: one could always add one more event. Thus even if an actual infinite were, in principle, possible, the temporal series of past events could not be one. The temporal series of events can therefore only be a potential infinite.

Graham Oppy has objected to Craig’s argument that the temporal series of (past) events must, in virtue of its being formed by successive addition, be a potential infinite. Oppy’s strategy is to deny that this series is in fact formed by successive addition, suggesting rather that one may reasonably hold that ‘time is dense or continuous, i.e. that it has a structure more like that of the rational or real numbers. If time is dense—i.e. if, between any two distinct times, there is a third time distinct from each—then it seems clear that it will not be accurate to say that time grows by successive addition. Rather, we should say that time grows by continuous addition.’ Unfortunately Oppy fails to explain what is meant by the process of ‘continuous addition,’ averring only that it does not denote the process of ‘successive addition.’ Indeed, even assuming the metaphysical coherence of ‘dense time,’ it is exceedingly difficult to see how such a ‘series’ might come to be formed. Is Oppy proposing that the innumerable (‘dense’) times fall, like some metaphysical rain, where they may? Surely not. But how, then, if not successively,

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36 Craig, The Kalām Cosmological Argument, p. 103.
does the series of past events come to be formed as such? At any rate, merely suggesting *ad hoc* alternatives to our intuition that the past was formed by successive addition, events occurring one after the other (hour after hour, day after day, year after year) is not sufficient reason to reject that intuition.

Though Craig’s purpose in exploring the impossibility of an actually infinite collection of events was to argue for the universe’s having a cause of its existence, he was startled to find the question of God’s relation to time returning to the foreground of his mind. For it became clear to Craig that if his conclusions were true, then the beginning of the temporal series of events entails that time itself had a beginning.\(^\text{38}\)

According to traditional Christian orthodoxy, however, God did not have a beginning. So for Craig the question of time and God’s relation to the beginning of time is a natural outgrowth of the *kalām* cosmological argument:

This forces us to re-examine…whether a beginning of the universe involves a beginning of time. For prior to the first event, the Creator of the universe exists…. Prior to the first event, the creation, God would exist changelessly and eternally. But what about subsequent to the first event?\(^\text{39}\)

Already we see the framework for Craig’s later investigations being constructed.

Shortly after leaving Birmingham, Craig undertook research for a second doctorate, this time as a Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung under the guidance of Wolfhart Pannenberg, professor of theology at the University of Munich.

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\(^{38}\) Craig thereby circumvents an objection which challenges the pure temporalist position, namely that if God has always existed then He, necessarily, must have traversed an actually infinite number of moments in order to reach the present moment. For a compelling presentation of this objection, see Steven B. Cowan, ‘A Reductio Ad Absurdum of Divine Temporality,’ *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 371-378. I shall explore this in greater length in chapter five.

Once again his research led to both an earned doctorate (D. Theol., 1984) and the publication of several books. Later, from 1987 to 1994, Craig resided in Brussels, Belgium, where he pursued research at the University of Louvain. It was during these years that Craig began to publish in earnest on ‘God and time.’ Since taking up his current position as Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology (La Mirada, California), Craig has only increased his extraordinary body of work on the topic, both clarifying and defending accidental temporalism.

3.3 The Nature of Time

As was seen in the previous chapter, Medieval Christian philosophical theologians (beginning especially with Duns Scotus) recognized the importance of the metaphysical nature of time for articulating a coherent view of God’s relationship to time. In developing his position Craig emphasizes the important interplay between the doctrine of divine eternity and the philosophy of time. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in Craig’s claim that ‘theologians and philosophers of religion can advance the discussion of the nature of divine eternity only by tackling the difficult and multifaceted problem of the tensed versus tenseless theory of time.’ The role of the philosophy of time is indeed a ‘fundamental watershed for our conception of divine eternity,’ for as Craig explains elsewhere:

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if we adopt a B-theory of time, most of the typical arguments against
divine timelessness…are doomed to failure….By contrast, on the A-
theory of time, the concept of a timeless God who is really related to
the world does seem incoherent. 42

Indeed, he thinks that without adjudicating between these two competing conceptions of
time, ‘the most important arguments for and against divine timelessness remain
inconclusive. The adjudication of this debate within the philosophy of…time is therefore
of critical importance and cannot be avoided.’ 43

It is generally agreed among contemporary scholars that one’s beliefs about time
impose certain constraints upon one’s view of God and time. 44 As we saw in the previous
chapter, Christian philosophical theologians—especially after Scotus—have been
increasingly aware of the importance of the metaphysical nature of time and the
concomitance of certain views of time with certain views of divine eternality.
Specifically, the view of God as existing timelessly within an ‘eternal present’ demands
the equal existence of the past, present, and future, whereas the denial that all times co-
exist on an ontological par implies that God exists temporally. Because of its significance
to this project, some introductory remarks on the abstruse metaphysics of time are in
order, before turning specifically to Craig’s position on the nature of time.

44 Stuart Foyle, for example, has shown in great detail that ‘we cannot really be B-theorists and divine
temporalists, and neither can we really be A-theorists and divine atemporalists’ (‘God, Time and Eternity:
Philosophical Foundations for a Defence of Divine Timelessness,’ [Ph. D. diss., Durham University, 2007],
p. 79. See his discussion from pp. 79-94). Garrett DeWeese argues persuasively for the same conclusion in
‘Timeless God, Tenseless Time,’ Philosophia Christi 2/1 (2000): 53-59. This point is echoed by Timothy
Sansbury: ‘A remarkably simple analysis demonstrates that the doctrine that God transcends time [i.e., the
atemporal view] requires that all times exist; in other words that God’s temporal transcendence entails the
B-theory of time’ (‘Divine Temporal Transcendence: A Defense of the Traditional Theological Position in
Science, Philosophy, and Theology’ [Ph. D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2006], p. 31).
3.3.1 Static vs. Dynamic Time

Since its publication in 1908, John Ellis McTaggart’s (1866 – 1925) landmark argument for the unreality of time has been the starting point for most work on the metaphysics of time (despite the widespread rejection of McTaggart’s own conclusion that time is unreal).\(^{45}\) McTaggart, who was both trained in and taught philosophy at Trinity College in the University of Cambridge, focused his efforts on metaphysics.\(^ {46}\) Though well known for his thorough treatments of Hegelian philosophy, McTaggart is most remembered for his contributions to the philosophy of time.\(^ {47}\) For our purposes the salient feature of McTaggart’s work is his distinction between two fundamentally different ways of thinking about the ordering of times and events: as an A-series or as a B-series. The former is meant to express the transitory nature of time, while the latter is meant to express permanent relations between entities.

Understood as an A-series, events and times are ordered in terms of the tensed properties of being past, being present, and being future (or, if you like, having pastness, having presentness, and having futurity). McTaggart called these properties ‘A-determinations.’ If an event is past, then it can be neither present nor future; if it is present, it can be neither past nor future; if it is future, it can be neither past nor present.


\(^{46}\) For a lengthy biographical sketch of McTaggart, see Peter Geach’s ‘Cambridge Philosophers III: McTaggart,’ *Philosophy* 70 (1995): 567-579.

So considered, time and events are in a constant state of flux. They are thus constantly changing in regard to their A-determinations: events as yet future become present, while present events cease and become past (receding then further into the past, or becoming more past). So the death of Plato, for example, was once in the distant future, grew steadily less future, became present, became past, and recedes ever further into the past. This process of the occurring now of formerly future events, and the subsequent belonging to the past of these events is called ‘temporal becoming.’\textsuperscript{48} As Richard Taylor observes:

\begin{quote}
Thus, we speak of future things as \textit{drawing near}, of then \textit{becoming} present, and, having passed into the present, of \textit{receding} endlessly into an ever growing past…Now this kind of motion or passage through time…seems to be…a basic and even necessary characteristic of reality.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Certainly this process is foundational to our familiar experience of reality.

Whereas a given event possesses A-determinations irrespective of other events, events possess B-determinations only in tandem with other events. Understood as a B-series, events and times are ordered in terms of the tenseless relations of being earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than—what McTaggart called ‘B-determinations.’

Taken in this sense, each event and time has a unique location in the B-series of events, such that some event $e_1$ is either earlier than, later than, or simultaneous with some event $e_2$ (the same is true of the times at which these events occur). The B-series does not involve change. For this reason events and times cannot change locations in the B-series (e.g., if it is ever true that $e_1$ is earlier than $e_2$, then it is \textit{always} true that $e_1$ is earlier than


As Richard Gale explains, ‘The death of Plato, for example, cannot sneak up on the
death of Queen Anne, for if one event is earlier than some other event by so many time-units it is always the case that the one is so many time-units earlier than the other.’\textsuperscript{50} This illustration is not meant to imply, of course, that events can somehow ‘sneak up’ on one another in the A-series; the feat is equally absurd in either series. The point is that, unlike the A-series, the B-series is static and unchanging.

For his part McTaggart held that both the A- and B-series understandings of time are, in some sense, true. In other words, he thought a given event must possess both A-determinations and B-determinations. But if a given event can be future (A-determination) at a given fixed date (B-determination), present at another, and past at still another, it seems to follow that the event in question has contradictory properties which seems incoherent. In other words, on the one hand, he mused, if an event has the A-property of being future, then it does not yet exist in any sense. If, on the other hand, that event has the B-property of existing at some fixed location in the B-series, then that event does exist. Thus the event both exists and does not exist, which is a contradiction. Or again, if all times are equally real, then a given event possesses the A-determination of being past (with respect to some events) as well as being future (with respect to some events). But no event can possess the incompatible properties of being past and being future, on pain of contradiction. This quandary has come to be called ‘McTaggart’s Paradox.’ Since the conclusion that events have contradictory properties is absurd and he

could see no means of reconciling the contradiction, McTaggart concluded that time must be unreal.\textsuperscript{51}

These different ways of ordering events and times have given rise to two competing ways of conceiving the nature of time: the dynamic theory and the static theory. As they are wont to do, philosophers have managed to obfuscate the debate by introducing a number of alternate terms for each. The former is also referred to as the ‘tensed theory,’ the ‘A-theory,’ the ‘realist’ view, and the ‘process theory’ of time. The latter is also called the ‘tenseless theory,’ the ‘B-theory,’ the ‘anti-realist’ view, and the ‘stasis theory’ of time.

In their characterization of time, dynamic theorists argue the A-series is the more fundamental description of time. In short, two events can stand in a certain B-relation (e.g., \textit{earlier than} and \textit{later than}) to one another precisely because each of the two events possesses certain A-determinations. Thus B-determinations reduce to A-determinations, but not vice versa. The idea is that a B-determination such as \textit{earlier than} is dependent upon the having of A-determinations by the events in question. For this reason, dynamic theorists will agree that the B-series exists but insist that it does not constitute a \textit{temporal} series.\textsuperscript{52} The dynamic theory affirms the objectivity of temporal becoming. We have seen that in this process events constantly change in their A-determinations. In affirming the


\textsuperscript{52} I say more about this point in section 3.3.2 of this chapter.
objectivity of temporal becoming, dynamic theorists insist that it is a mind-independent phenomenon: a genuine feature of reality that would occur even in the absence of sentient agents. This process is referred to in the vernacular as the passage of time; the gnawing tooth of time; the river of time, etc. Indeed, a variety of aphorisms and metaphors express the same phenomenon: things and events literally come to be and pass away in the course of time’s flow. In short, dynamic theorists insist that tense must be taken seriously as an objective feature of reality.

If this is so, then on the pure version of the dynamic theory known as ‘presentism,’ neither the past nor the future exist; only present events and times are real.53 There are, literally speaking, no times or events which have the property of being future/having futurity or being past/having pastness. A. N. Prior’s lucid explanation is worth repeating:

To say that Whitrow’s lecture is past is to say that it has been the case that Whitrow is lecturing. To say that Scott’s lecture is future is to say that it will be the case that Scott is lecturing—flat, no prefixes. The pastness of an event, that is to say its having taken place, is not the same thing as the event itself; nor is its futurity; but the presentness of an event is just the event. The presentness of my lecturing, for instance, is just my lecturing.54

Thus when a time slips into the past, rather than gaining any new property (such as having pastness) it literally ceases to exist.55 This reveals an important ontological feature


55 There is some variation in how presentism is defined, but presentists seem to agree on this much. John Bigelow, for example, defines it as the thesis that ‘nothing exists which is not present’ (‘Presentism and Properties,’ in Philosophical Perspectives 10, ed. J. Tomberlin [Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996]), while
of temporal reality on the dynamic view: ‘the only temporal items which exist exist presently…On a presentist ontology, past and future events/things/times are not real or existent, and, hence, do not exemplify properties like pastness or futurity.’\textsuperscript{56} Hence the dynamic theorist grants to the present an ontologically privileged status over the past and future.

Some philosophers deny all of this, advocating a radically different view of reality. According to them, all times and events eternally co-exist and are statically ordered by the tenseless relations of earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than. This view is thus known as the ‘static theory’ of time.\textsuperscript{57} Nathan Oaklander, a proponent of this view, explains that on this theory ‘all events in the temporal series are equally real; there are no fundamental ontological distinctions between past, present and future events.’\textsuperscript{58} Static time theorists argue that A-determinations such as \textit{is past} or \textit{is future} are dependent upon the having of B-determinations by the events in question, but not vice versa. The A-series is therefore considered contradictory, since if all times equally co-exist, it follows that each member of the A-series possesses incompatible A-determinations (i.e., each event possesses the incompatible properties of \textit{being past}, \textit{being present}, and \textit{being}

\begin{footnotes}
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future), which is contradictory. If this is so an event is not future simpliciter, but rather is future only in the sense that it is later than other events. Static theorists thus regard the B-series as the more fundamental description of time. On this account time does not ‘flow’ or ‘fly by’ (i.e., there is no temporal becoming) but is seen as a fourth dimension, alongside the familiar spatial dimensions. My computer, for example, is extended in both the three spatial dimensions and the temporal dimension.59 This assumes that the universe is actually a four-dimensional, space-time manifold. The static theory denies that the now/present enjoys any ontological distinction. Rather, what we refer to as the past, present, and future exist on an ontological par. In other words, all times are equally real. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is the conception of time implicit in the timeless view of divine eternity of the Medieval era. We may think that there is a real, objective difference between them, but such distinction is a purely subjective feature of consciousness: a trick of the mind.60 This is not meant as a misconstrual of the static theory. Rather, the point hinges on the significant metaphysical differences between the dynamic and static theories of time. According to static theorists, for the people living in 1250, like Aquinas, the events of 1250 are present and the events of 2010 are future. Similarly, for the people living in 2010, the events of 2010 are present and those of 1250 are past. On the static theory neither 1250 nor 2010—indeed, no time—is objectively ‘the present.’ Indeed, the B-theorist regards the temporal ‘now’ as analogous to the spatial concept ‘here.’ All these times and events, however, are equally real, with their tense being merely a subjective matter of consciousness. As Adolf Grünbaum explains, on the

59 Though this is the typical account of this view, some B-theorists will understand my computer to be a three-dimensional object that has three-dimensional location at time \( t_1 \) and \( t_2 \), though only its location at \( t_1 \) happens ‘now’.

60 This issue, the reader will recall, was brought up in the previous chapter, in n. 168.
static theory ‘coming into being (or “becoming”) is not a property of physical events themselves but only of human or conscious awareness of these events.’\(^6^1\) Indeed, Grünbaum emphasizes the epistemological and ontological divide in this respect:

> It is apparent that the becoming of physical events in our temporal awareness does not itself guarantee that becoming has a mind-independent physical [i.e., ontological] status. Common-sense colour attributes, for example, surely appear to be properties of physical objects independently of our awareness of them and are held to be such by common sense. And yet scientific theory tells us that they are mind-dependent qualities like sweet and sour are.\(^6^2\)

Thus on the static view of time temporal becoming is not an objectively real feature of extra-mental reality, as on the dynamic theory, but is instead a mind-dependent phenomenon. This does not seem meant to imply that an objectively real process of temporal becoming occurs in the mental realm (if this were so we would be faced with an objectively real process of mental becoming and therefore dynamic time). Rather, as with our perception of an (seemingly) objective difference between the past, present, and future, our perception of the coming to be and passing away of events is an illusion of consciousness. This seems akin to the familiar perception that time is dragging on (as when visiting the office of motor vehicles) or flying by (as when having great fun): time does not literally (metaphysically) pass more slowly or quickly; such perceptions are illusions of one’s consciousness.

The preceding analysis of time positions us to clarify an occasional misunderstanding. It is sometimes suggested that pitting the static view against the


dynamic view of time constitutes a false dichotomy; might not both views be correct, depending on a given perspective? Could we not hold that God immanently experiences the A-series and transcendently the B-series? The answer should now be clear: the two are mutually exclusive. Dynamic time theorists and static time theorists posit contradictory metaphysical realities. Either the A-series reduces to the B-series because A-determinations are analyzable in terms of B-determinations (as the static theorists hold), or the B-series reduces to the A-series because B-determinations are analyzable in terms of A-determinations (as the dynamic theorists hold). By the same token, either temporal becoming is an objective feature of reality (as the dynamic theorists hold), or it is merely a subjective psychological phenomenon (as the static theorists hold). Likewise, either all of the past, present, and future exist on an ontological par (as the static theorists hold), or there is an essential ontological distinction between past, present, and future times (as the dynamic theorists hold).

3.3.2 Craig and the Nature of Time

For a number of reasons, both philosophical and theological, Craig rejects the static view in favor of the dynamic view of temporal reality. While a full rehearsal of these reasons is beyond the scope of this thesis, given the emphasis Craig places on this decision some consideration of his primary reasons is in order. Craig’s positive reasons for affirming the dynamic theory may be adumbrated as follows.

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63 Indeed, in addition to multiple article and chapter length treatments, Craig has written two sister volumes entirely on this decision: The Tenseless Theory of Time: A Critical Examination (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) and The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000). A full evaluation of Craig’s reasons for affirming the dynamic theory is far beyond the scope—and purpose—of this chapter, which is to explicate Craig’s position on God and time.
I. Temporal becoming is a mind-independent feature of reality.

Central to his affirmation of the dynamic theory of time is Craig’s position regarding the process of temporal becoming. Craig begins his defense of the mind-independence of temporal becoming with an appeal to our commonplace, natural, and justified belief that tense is an objective feature of reality: ‘It is precisely my contention that belief in the objectivity of…temporal becoming is a properly basic belief.’\(^6^4\) The epistemological notion of properly basic beliefs is borrowed from Alvin Plantinga, who explains:

\[\text{[A] proposition is } \text{basic}\text{ for me if I believe it and do not believe it on the basis of other propositions. This relationship is familiar but hard to characterize in a revealing and nontrivial fashion. I believe the word ‘umbrageous’ is spelled } u\text{-}m\text{-}b\text{-}r\text{-}a\text{-}g\text{-}e\text{-}o\text{-}u\text{-}s: \text{this belief is based on another belief of mine, the belief that this is how the dictionary says it is spelled. I believe that } 72 \times 71 = 5112. \text{This belief is based upon several other beliefs I hold…. Some of my beliefs, however, I accept but do not accept on the basis of other beliefs. Call these beliefs basic.}\]\(^6^5\)

Clearly different people will take a variety of different beliefs as basic: beliefs we hold independently of other beliefs, but of course being \textit{basic} is not the same as being \textit{true}.

Plantinga further explains that some basic beliefs are \textit{properly} basic—that is, rationally believed—just in case they are formed under appropriate circumstances.\(^6^6\) For example, if upon looking out my office window I form the belief that \textit{I see a tree}, that belief—\textit{not} held on the basis of any other beliefs—is basic for me. A little reflection reveals that this

\(^6^6\) ‘Reason and Belief in God,’ p. 79; cf., Craig, \textit{The Tensed Theory of Time}, p. 137.
belief is properly basic, for my noetic faculties appear to be functioning properly and
there is in fact a tree just beyond my office window. That I am having this commonplace
experience justifies my holding the belief. This does not guarantee, of course, that my
belief that I see a tree is necessarily true, because further investigation may turn up a
defeater for that belief. Of course yet further investigation may vindicate my belief.
Regardless, the point is not that my belief is necessarily true because it is properly basic;
rather, the point is that my belief that I see a tree, being properly basic, is prima facie
justified in the absence of any defeaters.67

Craig regards the common belief in an objective past, present, and future, ‘not as
an inference drawn from experience by way of providing an explanation of that
experience,’ but rather as one formed ‘automatically in the context of our experience of
the world.’68 He thus regards this belief as properly basic. This means that we are prima
facie justified in this belief. Given, then, that belief in objective tense is ubiquitous in our
everyday experience of reality—indeed, even Hugh Mellor, an ardent static theorist,
acknowledges that ‘[t]ense is so striking an aspect of reality that only the most
compelling argument justifies denying it: namely, that the tensed view of time is self-
contradictory’69—all that remains is to rebut B-theorists’ attacks. Though Craig’s strategy
is first to locate the burden of proof upon those who deny the objectivity of temporal

67 Thus Nathan Oaklander’s claim that Craig, ‘in characterizing our belief in temporal becoming and the
reality of tense as property [sic] basic’ is ‘assuming at the outset that the A-theory of time is true….This
way of putting the matter begs the question…’ (‘Craig on the Experience of Tense,’ in L. Nathan
Oaklander, The Ontology of Time [Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004], p. 236), is off the mark.
68 Craig, The Tensed Theory of Time, p. 133. Garrett DeWeese similarly explains this automatic formation
of A-beliefs as resultant of ‘direct experiences’ (God and the Nature of Time, p. 35).
becoming, he goes on to argue for the incoherence of the notion of mind-dependent temporal becoming.\textsuperscript{70}

II. \textit{Our experience of temporal becoming.}

Closely related to his claim that our commonplace belief in objective temporal becoming is properly basic is Craig’s appeal to the phenomenology of our experience, an ineradicable feature of which he argues is temporal becoming. Just as we affirm the existence of the external world, so ‘we experience [the] world, not as a static tableau, but as a continual flux.’\textsuperscript{71} In other words, to experience the world just is to experience temporal becoming: times and things appear actually to begin to exist. The claim is that this is due to the world’s being presented to us as a \textit{tensed} world wherein things and events are genuinely past, present, and future, rather than merely related by the timeless B-determinations. On the static theory of time \textit{nothing} is actually in the state of flux and becoming that we believe ourselves to perceive.\textsuperscript{72} George Schlesinger agrees: ‘there is a strong case for claiming that these [different attitudes toward the past and future] are justified only if time also has a transient aspect, and moments do partake in a movement the direction of which is specifically from the future toward the past.’\textsuperscript{73} The tension, then, is between the ontology of the static theory and our experience of flux and becoming.

\textsuperscript{70} Craig, \textit{The Tenseless Theory of Time}, pp. 167-177.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{The Tenseless Theory of Time}, p. 159 (cf. Craig, \textit{Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time} [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001], pp. 139-142). John Callahan similarly remarks that our ‘common knowledge of time is something that we must consider, and any detailed examination of time must not be out of harmony with it. Otherwise we should be explaining something other than that which men in general call time’ (\textit{Four Views of Time in Ancient Philosophy} [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948], p. 97).

\textsuperscript{72} Craig is not claiming that what we perceive is \textit{time} itself, but rather changes or events \textit{in time}.

\textsuperscript{73} George N. Schlesinger, \textit{Aspects of Time} (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1980), p. 34 and subsequent discussion.
To illustrate his claim, Craig adduces such common experience as wishing it were now some other time.\textsuperscript{74} For example, what child hasn’t wished it were now Christmas morning? Who has not wished it were now some past, perhaps happier, time? Or wished that the present, perhaps unpleasant, time were now past? That this wish will certainly go unfulfilled is quite beside the point. The force of Craig’s claim lies in what is presupposed in the mere wishing: namely, ‘the reality of temporal becoming, since we evidently believe that the various moments in the temporal series become successively present.’\textsuperscript{75} In Craig’s estimation, such wishes cannot be otherwise accurately captured. The idea is that, on the B-theory of time, events in time are neither receding from us into the past nor drawing nearer from the future. On the static-theory the child’s wish, for example, becomes an ersatz-wish akin to ‘I wish that Christmas were celebrated on the seventeenth of December instead of the twenty-fifth.’ But that is simply not what is being wished; the child’s wish is that some other time possessed the A-determination of being present than the time which does.\textsuperscript{76} Or again, let us imagine ourselves at some time $t_2$, between times at which unpleasant events occur, $t_1$ and $t_3$. Since neither of these events occurs at $t_2$, why experience at $t_2$ feelings of dread or regret? The seeming answer is our


\textsuperscript{75} ‘Wishing It Were Now Some Other Time,’ p. 160.

\textsuperscript{76} One is tempted to respond, on behalf of the B-theorist, that surely the child’s wish that it were now Christmas morning could be re-expressed as ‘I wish I were now experiencing Christmas morning!’ This, however, is to sneak temporality in through the back door. Since ‘now’ on the B-theory means merely ‘this temporal slice,’ the re-expression reduces to ‘I wish that this temporal slice, say, December 17th, rather than another slice (i.e., December 25th) were identical to Christmas.’ But surely \textit{that} isn’t the child’s wish, for next year she’s not wishing that Christmas were on December 17th. Rather, she is \textit{now} wishing that Christmas were \textit{now}. Craig’s point is not to render the B-theorist’s explanation of this wish in awkward language, for (as with most philosophical unpackings of ordinary and familiar concepts) the A-theorist’s explanation—namely, ‘I wish today (December 17th) did not have one of the A-properties it does in fact have’—hardly roll’s off the tongue. Nevertheless, it does enjoy the virtue of accurately capturing the child’s wish.
knowledge that we will experience the unpleasantness at \( t_3 \). Yet this seems sensible only if that event is actually drawing nearer (i.e., moving from the future toward the present).\(^{77}\)

In short, such attitudes presuppose a changing and objective present, which entails the reality of temporal becoming.

III. The direction of time’s arrow.

A further sense in which Craig argues that temporal becoming is an ineradicable feature of reality is its ability to account for the asymmetry of time. This asymmetry consists in two features: (1) the ‘anisotropy’ of time, which is its being ordered by the B-determinations, and (2) the ‘arrow’ or ‘directionality’ of time, which is oriented from the past into the future.

When considering the anisotropy of time, we are referring to its bi-directionality, namely its being ordered by the earlier than direction and the later than relations, which derives from the corresponding B-determinations. By contrast, consider three places: Paris, Berlin, and Moscow. These cities can be spatially ordered from either west to east (i.e., Paris, Berlin, Moscow) or east to west (i.e., Moscow, Berlin, Paris). Neither ordering is objectively superior to the other; these cities can be spatially ordered in either way.\(^{78}\) As Craig explains, ‘series which are anisotropic do not necessarily possess an orientation; for example, the temperature gradient is ordered by the relations of colder than/hotter than but has no orientation. Temperature readings may move in either direction along the gradient…. If a series has a direction, then it follows necessarily that

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\(^{77}\) Schlesinger offers a similar argument in *Aspects of Time*, p. 35.

it is anisotropic as well, though anisotropy is not a guarantee of directionality. In short, series such as the temperature gradient or the cities of Paris, Berlin, and Moscow have orders (e.g., east to west or west to east) but they lack objective directions. Regarded as merely anisotropic, then, time lacks an inherent direction.

Though time can be ordered by the earlier than and later than directions, this is distinct from time’s intrinsic directionality. Time is oriented from the past into the future, not vice versa. For example, time cannot flow from the future into the past. But why? What is it that determines this single metaphysical directionality? It is, after all, difficult (if not downright contradictory) to imagine events occurring in the opposite order from the order in which they actually happen. According to dynamic theorists, such as Craig, this directionality is the result of temporal becoming. If my computer now exists, then in order to continue existing into subsequent moments, then subsequent moments must themselves come into existence. But these moments must come into existence after the present moment, for ‘it seems completely unintelligible to say that the additional moment is before the present moment.’

This is precisely the phenomenon accounted for by temporal becoming. By contrast, as Craig observes, ‘on the B-theory of time, there are really two directions to time: one the “earlier than” direction and the other the “later than” direction. In the absence of temporal becoming it is wholly arbitrary how these directions are laid on the series of events.’ In the absence of temporal becoming static theorists must, therefore, impose on the temporal series their presupposition of time’s

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80 *The Tensed Theory of Time*, p. 249.

arrow. On the other hand dynamic theorists, in virtue of affirming temporal becoming, can explain the arrow of time. Craig thus embraces the dynamic theory of time.

IV. The ineliminability of tense in experience.

Another feature of the phenomenology of our experience to which Craig points is the ineliminability of tense in our experience. We routinely think of past or future experiences, such as the end of term, with fondness or anxiety. According to Craig, ‘the beliefs which are in some way the objects of or presupposed by such attitudes are typically basic and entail the reality of tense.’ Echoing A. N. Prior, Craig contends that when we make such claims as, ‘Thank goodness that’s over!’ we do not mean ‘Thank goodness the date of that thing’s conclusion is June 15, 1954!’ or ‘Thank goodness that thing’s conclusion is simultaneous with this utterance’—for why should anyone thank goodness for that? The claim here is that, given a tenseless ontology, there appears to be no fact which can justify our attitude of joy or relief. In neither of the attempted tenseless renderings is the event actually finis, it remains fully existing albeit at an earlier temporal location. Rather, in uttering ‘Thank goodness that’s over’ we are expressing tensed facts which simply cannot be accurately reformulated into tenseless expressions. But, claims Craig, if such expressions are made rationally, then it follows that the underlying belief in tense is rational and belief in tense depends on temporal becoming.

85 Someone may object at this point that atemporalists about God’s eternality do not deny such human experiences—‘God is atemporal, not humans!’ However, inasmuch as they are B-theorists, atemporalists deny the objective reality of temporal becoming. Yet if tense is in fact an ineliminable element of our
In a similar vein, Craig highlights the presentness of our experience. It hardly needs pointing out that we experience events as present; that is, in our experience present events seem to be ontologically privileged. There is seemingly something metaphysically special about the present. Yet the static theory must deny this, insisting that times are on an ontological par. This raises the question of why present experiences seem privileged to us. As Craig notes, it is tempting to explain this by observing that such experiences seem this way because they are occurring now, but on the static theory, there is no objective now. The tensed theory, on the other hand, has a ready explanation: only present events appear real because these are literally the only ones occurring. Past events have occurred and future events will (presumably) occur, but there are no non-present existents. Craig takes this to indicate the veridicality of the dynamic theory.

V. *B-determinations reduce to A-determinations.*

Endorsing an argument originally offered by McTaggart himself Craig claims that B-determinations reduce to (or if you prefer, presuppose) A-determinations, thus indicating that the B-series of events is made possible only by the prior positing of the A-series. The idea here is that events which share the B-relation of being earlier than and later than stand in a temporal relation only because those events also have changing A-

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87 Craig’s phenomenological argumentation at this point should not be misunderstood as the claim that our experience defines the limits or metaphysical nature of reality. Craig is not arguing that our experience of time as dynamic (somehow) causes time to be dynamic in nature. The claim, rather, is that we experience time and events as dynamic (there seems to be something ontologically special about the present). The best explanation, it seems, is that this experience is a result of time’s actually being dynamic in nature (not vice versa).

determinations. If true, this would demand that times and events regarded as a B-series (that is, without A-determinations) would be a series but not a temporal series. Thus the Cambridge philosopher of time C. D. Broad suggests ‘that the relation “earlier than” can hold only between terms which have A-characteristics; just as harmonic relations can hold only between terms which have pitch. And…the degree of the B-relation between two terms depends on the difference between the determinate values of their A-characteristics.’

It is not disputed that B-relations hold on the static theory, but as Craig asks: ‘why, on the B-theory, [should] those relations which are said to obtain among putatively temporal particulars deserve to be called “earlier than” or “later than,” why [should] these relations so labeled…be thought temporal at all?’ After all, by jettisoning that in virtue of which it is a temporal series, the B-series is rendered inadequate as a theory of time.

This argument is best understood by recalling Aristotle’s observation that ‘time cannot exist without change.’ Given this, in order to be a temporal series, the B-series would have to allow for change. That is, times and events somehow would have to change without changing their A-determinations, which McTaggart claimed and Craig agrees is impossible. This is because within a B-series, such as time on the static theory,

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91 It may be responded that this series nevertheless qualifies as temporal, for a temporal being would experience the one event before the other. Such a response is inadequate, however, because for the temporal being that’s a misperception of reality, a deceptive appearance of reality. Clearly we couldn’t say reality is such and such simply because someone has the illusion that it’s such and such. Further, McTaggart distinguished a third series from the A and B series, namely, the C series. If we subtract from the series of events all A-determinations, then, according to McTaggart, what remains is an atemporal series involving no change but only an order, akin to the letters of the alphabet (cf. McTaggart, ’The Unreality of Time,’ pp. 461-462).

events are eternally fixed: all events tenselessly occur in ‘earlier than’ and ‘later than’ relations. On the static theory, the phrase the apple changes from red to green can at most mean that there is a tenseless moment $t_2$ at which the apple is red and there is a series of tenseless moments $t_5$ through $t_n$ at which the apple timelessly is green.\footnote{For a discussion of ‘change’ given the tenseless theory of time, see Michael Loux, \textit{Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction}, 3d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 208-211.} Since on the tenseless theory of time things and events are eternally fixed within the B-series framework, the apple \textit{eternally} (tenselessly) exists at $t_2$ as red, and the apple \textit{eternally} (tenselessly) exists at $t_5$ through $t_n$ as green, and this is not really change at all. Thus, since the B-series alone does not constitute a temporal series, Craig concludes that the static theory of time is to be rejected in favor of the dynamic theory.

VI. Robust doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo} demands the dynamic theory.

Craig argues in several places that the static theory of time compromises the Christian doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo}, thus requiring a dynamic conception of time. Craig’s reasoning is that, in the absence of compelling reasons to do otherwise, the traditional\footnote{So the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215: ‘We firmly believe and openly confess that there is only one true God…the Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal; who from the very beginning of time by His omnipotent power created \textit{out of nothing} both the spiritual beings and the corporeal’ (emphasis mine); so the Westminster Confession: ‘It pleased God…in the beginning, to create or \textit{make of nothing} the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible’ (cf. Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, XI.5.7). I shall expand on these thoughts in chapter four.} \textit{ex nihilo} interpretation of Scripture’s claim that ‘[i]n the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1.1) ought to be maintained.\footnote{Craig expends considerable effort defending this as the biblical understanding of creation in \textit{Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), pp. 29-91; as well as \textit{God, Time and Eternity}, pp. 247-253 (cf. Paul Copan, ‘Is Creation \textit{ex nihilo} a Post-biblical Invention?: An Examination of Gerhard May’s Proposal,’ \textit{Trinity Journal} 17 [1996]: 77-93).} That is, the
universe had an absolute, temporal beginning at some point in the finite past when God
brought it into existence without a material cause. More precisely, this means that

\[ E_1. e \text{ comes into being at some time } t \text{ iff (i) } e \text{ exists at } t, \text{ (ii) } t \text{ is the first time at which } e \text{ exists, and (iii) } e \text{'s existing at } t \text{ is a tensed fact.} \]

Accordingly,

\[ E_2. \text{ God creates } e \text{ at some time } t \text{ iff God brings it about that } e \text{ comes into being at } t. \]

Thus God’s creating is distinct from God’s conserving the universe in existence, for the
latter presupposes the existence of some subject which God conserves in existence
whereas by the former we mean God’s literally bringing the subject into existence out of
nothing in the finite past. For the static theorist, however, this distinction is blurred:

*Creatio ex nihilo* for the B-theorist means only that the world depends
immediately upon God for its existence at every moment. The B-
theorist’s affirmation that God brought the universe into being out of
nothing at some moment in the finite past can at best mean that there is
(tenselessly) a moment which is separated from any other moment by
a finite interval of time and before which no moment of comparable
duration exists and that whatever exists at any moment, including the
moments themselves, is tenselessly sustained in being immediately by
God….There is in the actual world no state of affairs of God existing
alone without the spacetime universe.

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96 As Stephen Hawking observes, ‘almost everybody now believes that the universe, and time itself, had a
beginning at the big bang’ (Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, *The Nature of Space and Time*
[Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996], p. 20). See footnote 12 of this chapter for elaboration of
Aristotle’s four causes, including material causes.


98 Craig, *The Tenseless Theory of Time*, pp. 219-220. It is commonly objected that the notion of a ‘first
moment in time’ or a ‘beginning of time’ is absurd, for, it is claimed, we can easily imagine a moment
before creation or a moment prior to the first event. However, creation *ex nihilo* implies that nothing
existed then something existed—the first event. As Craig explains, to speak of a moment ‘before creation’
only seems to imply the impossibility of time’s beginning. He likens such language to physicists’ claims
that there are no temperatures ‘lower than’ absolute zero. Though the language of ‘lower than’ is used,
physicists obviously do not thereby presuppose there actually are temperatures lower than absolute zero—
though we can imagine such (Craig, ‘God, Time, and Eternity,’ p. 500). The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*
will be considered in greater detail in chapter five.
This, according to Craig, is tantamount to denying that God literally brings the universe into existence, implying instead the universe’s timeless co-existence with God. The dynamic theory, on the other hand, easily accommodates the traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, understanding the universe’s absolute beginning in the finite past as an instance of temporal becoming.\(^99\) This is an argument to which we shall return in chapter five.

### 3.4 God: Timeless sans Creation

These, then, are the primary reasons why Craig affirms the dynamic nature of time. Given Craig’s conclusion that the spatio-temporal universe had a temporal beginning at some point in the finite past when God freely\(^100\) created it *ex nihilo*, it follows that the actual world must include a state of affairs which consists of God

\(^{99}\) Perhaps a word of clarification is in order regarding this particular point. It has been objected that the use of such theological premises introduces a ‘potentially problematic element’ into Craig’s God and time project (Foyle, ‘God, Time and Eternity,’ p. 77). Craig claims that, though secular scholars may neglect such premises in opting for a view of time, ‘Christian philosophers…take such objections with utmost seriousness. A view which is philosophically coherent but theologically untenable cannot be true. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, to reflect on the theological implications of one’s theory of time with a view to assessing its adequacy’ (Craig, *The Tenseless Theory of Time*, p. 218). The worry is that ‘[t]o say…as Craig does, that a philosophically coherent but theologically untenable position “cannot be true” seems to be rather rash, since it smacks of unchallengeable premises rather than of defensible commitments’ (Foyle, p. 78). This concern, it seems, is founded on a misunderstanding. Craig is not claiming an ‘unchallengeable’ premise, for he subjects his understanding of creation *ex nihilo* to considerable scrutiny. Moreover, just as a philosophically coherent position could be theologically untenable and thus false, so a theologically coherent position could be philosophically untenable and thus false—as far as Christian scholars are concerned. From a secular standpoint, *any* theological premise will probably be denigrated as ‘unchallengeable’ (this was largely the objection of Verificationism, recall), but then the entire project of investigating God’s relation to time will be dismissed by secularists for it presupposes the existence of God! This is, after all, an ‘in house’ discussion. Why theological premises should be surrendered at the hands of secular rejections thereof is unclear to me. Regardless, Craig’s case does not rest solely (or even primarily) on this premise; as we’ve seen, he affirms the dynamic view for several non-theological reasons.

existing alone without any creation.\textsuperscript{101} So God did not begin to exist, the universe including time did begin to exist at some point in the finite past, and time is dynamic in nature. If these propositions are to be coherently affirmed, the question of God’s temporal status \textit{sans} the universe must be considered.

Though, as we saw in chapter one, Scripture is inconclusive concerning the metaphysical nature of God’s eternality, the writers of Scripture give us to believe that God did not begin to exist at creation. As Craig puts it, ‘the biblical authors do state that time had a beginning and thereby imply that God without the universe is timeless.’\textsuperscript{102} If, as we saw in our consideration of the \textit{kalām} cosmological argument, time did begin at creation but God did not begin to exist at creation, it follows that \textit{sans} creation there is no time to which God could be related. To help conceptualize this idea, Craig offers a thought experiment: ‘imagine God existing changelessly alone in a possible world in which He refrains from creating. In such a world, God is reasonably conceived to be timeless. But God, actually existing alone without creation, is no different than He would be in such a possible world, even though in the actual world He becomes temporal by creating.’\textsuperscript{103} Thus, if there is, \textit{sans} creation, no time to which God could be related, then in such a state God must be timeless.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{101} I explore the implications of the doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo} more fully in chapter five.


\textsuperscript{103} Craig, \textit{Time and Eternity}, p. 236.

\textsuperscript{104} Though it is not necessary for his argument regarding God’s relationship to time, Craig suggests we elucidate the timeless interactions of the Trinity in terms of the classical doctrine of \textit{perichoresis} or the co-inherence of the Persons of the Trinity. According to T. F. Torrance, this doctrine refers to ‘the dynamic Union and Communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with one another in one Being in such a way that they have their Being in each other and reciprocally contain one another, without any coalescing or commingling with one another and yet without any separation from one another, for they are completely equal and identical in Deity and Power. Each Person contains the one God in virtue of his relation to the
At this point it may be tempting to conceive of God as existing temporally before the universe, which would mean God *sans* creation is temporal (i.e., the view of Swinburne, Wolterstorff, and Hasker we saw in chapter two). But since time itself began at creation, there is no temporal *before* creation. This is perhaps the most frequently misunderstood point of Craig’s view. Paul Helm’s critique, for example, evinces confusion on this point: ‘But how can God exist timelessly (but not statically), occupying (until the creation) a timeless point of an A-series, existing “literally before God’s creation of the world and the beginning of differentiated time”?’ Laying aside the fact that on Craig’s view it is simply meaningless to speak of ‘until the creation,’ it is important to realize that according to Craig there is no A-series of time *until or in the absence of the moment of creation*. In other words it is not the case that, *sans* creation, God occupies some point within an A-series. Thus if time itself began at creation, then God *sans* the universe must be timeless: again, there is no time to which God could be related! More precisely,

[i]n reality God existing *sans* creation is entirely alone, utterly changeless and perfect, and not a single event disturbs his immobility. There is no before, no after, no temporal passage, no future phase of

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105 Those who agree that God is temporal and has not changed temporal mode (e.g., Alan Padgett, Richard Swinburne, Garrett DeWeese) will deny this. They will agree that physical time began at creation, but argue that metaphysical time is everlastingly old. If time is everlastingly old, there seems to be no way for us to know when metaphysical time begins. If ‘everlastingly old’ amounts to ‘beginningless,’ as it appears it must, then all the old problems resulting from the Kalām cosmological argument return to haunt us, thus undercutting the objection. We will examine in some detail an objection to this claim in the next chapter.

106 Paul Helm, ‘Response to William Lane Craig,’ in *God and Time: Four Views*, p. 164. Much more will be said about this in the fourth chapter.
his life. There is just God, changeless and solitary. [I]nsofar as the state of affairs of God existing sans the universe obtains, there are, of course, no temporal states of affairs—not in the future or anywhere else. Nothing exists but God in this utterly changeless state.  

Such a state must therefore, in Craig’s estimation, fairly obviously be characterized as one of pure timelessness. This much would seem to follow from God’s being the Creator of time.

Craig’s claim that God exists timelessly sans creation (including the absence of time) may seem, however, to present a difficulty in our attempts at conceptualizing creation. Since Craig’s position is that sans creation the Persons of the Trinity timelessly co-exist in a state of *perichoresis*—changelessly, with an absence of events—then it follows that God’s creative act constitutes the first event; on accidental temporalism the creation of the universe by God thus occurs at a moment of time. Brian Leftow, however, has argued that ‘to create time is to account for the fact that the set of times has members’ and so ‘if God acts from within time, at (say) $t$, to create $t + 1$, then when God acts, it is already true prior to His action that the set of times has members, and so it is false that God accounts for its having members.’ If Leftow is correct, then Craig’s view does not allow for God’s being the Creator of time. This furthermore implies, Leftow explains, that ‘so long as God acts only at a moment of time…God cannot account for the set of times’ having members,’ in other words, if He acts only at a moment of time God cannot be the Creator of time. To support his conclusion, Leftow considers and rejects two

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109 *Time and Eternity*, p. 274. Paul Helm offers a nearly identical objection: ‘The chief problem with this hybrid view is over…the coming into existence of the world being represented as an A-series temporal event for God. Craig has the idea that it is possible that God exists in a timelessly eternal fashion and then
proposals for conceiving of God as the Creator of time. First, suppose God acts at $t$ to create times prior to $t$.\textsuperscript{110} If possible, this would allow us to say that God always acts at a moment of time and that God is the Creator of time. However, if $t$ is the first moment of time and (as Leftow notes) God does not possess causal power over the past, then it is not possible for God to act at $t$ to create times prior to $t$. This reading must therefore be rejected and so cannot save Craig’s claim. Second, suppose God acts at $t$ to create $t$. This proposal too would allow us to say that God always acts at a moment of time and that God is the Creator of time. The difficulty with this proposal, says Leftow, is that God’s action at $t$ presupposes God’s existence at $t$, but God’s existence at $t$ presupposes the existence of $t$. In short, this proposal seems to entail that in order create time, God must already exist at some time, which is incoherent. As Leftow puts it, ‘no action can account for the obtaining of its own actual conditions.’\textsuperscript{111} In other words, the conditions for the obtaining of time $t$ cannot coherently be said to include the obtaining of time $t$ at $t$. Thus according to Leftow it seems accidental temporalism cannot coherently conceptualize God’s creative relation to the first moment of time.

In response to Leftow’s arguments, Craig maintains that one can in fact coherently affirm that God acts at $t$ to create $t$. To explain this Craig appeals to the notion

\textsuperscript{110} Time and Eternity, p. 274.

\textsuperscript{111} Time and Eternity, p. 274.
of ‘simultaneous creation.’\textsuperscript{112} The idea is that God’s ‘creative causal act and the physical effect occur simultaneously.’\textsuperscript{113} It is God’s action that causes time to begin to exist (i.e., God’s creating is the first event), and there is no reason to insist that a cause must temporally precede its effect. Indeed, philosophers have long acknowledged the plausibility of the metaphysical notion of simultaneous causation. Immanuel Kant, for example, explains that

\begin{quote}
the principle of the causal connection of phenomena...applies also to their co-existence, because cause and effect may exist at the same time.... The time between the causality of the cause and its immediate effect can be vanishing (they may be simultaneous), but the relation of the one to the other remains for all that determinable in time. If I look upon a ball that rests on a soft cushion and makes a depression in it, as a cause, it is simultaneous with its effect.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

We might just as well imagine a submerged log that is causing water to be displaced, or a man who from eternity has been sitting down thus causing the existence of a lap. In either case the cause is temporally simultaneous with its effect, though causally (or explanatorily) prior to it. So Craig’s contention is that God’s act of creation is conceptually (or explanatorily) prior to the first moment of time, but temporally simultaneous with it, which preserves God’s timelessness sans creation as well as God’s being the Creator of \( t \) at \( t \).\textsuperscript{115}


\textsuperscript{113} \textit{God, Time, and Eternity}, p. 276. The concomitant view of time (the ‘relational’ view) is developed in the next chapter.


According to accidental temporalism, then, God sans creation exists in a state of timelessness. This state is to be conceived of not as temporally before but rather logically or explanatorily prior to the moment of creation. Since God’s creative act is the first event, it is appropriate to say that God’s creative act occurs at the first moment of time. As an instance of simultaneous causation, God’s creative act is the cause of time’s beginning.

3.5 God: Temporal subsequent to Creation

Even if God exists timelessly sans the temporal universe, the crucial question is whether He remains timeless or becomes temporal with the creation of the world. Craig contends that in virtue of His real relation to the temporal universe, God entered into time at the moment of creation. Indeed, given God’s free decision to be really related to the temporal world, Craig argues it is metaphysically impossible that He remain timeless. For even if God is timeless sans the universe, at the moment of creation God assumes a new relation, namely, that of sustaining the temporal universe, or at least of co-existing with that universe. This is ‘a real, causal relation which is at that moment new to God and which He does not have in the state of existing sans creation.’ Even granting this, however, what reason do we have to conclude that God is drawn into time? In his writings Craig offers two primary reasons.

I. God’s real relation to the temporal world.

As we have seen, Craig takes genuine tense and temporal becoming as objectively real features of the world. Times and events come into existence (become present) then

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116 God, Time, and Eternity, p. 60.
117 The reader may find it useful to revisit the discussion in chapter 1.2 of this thesis.
pass out of existence, with the consequence that only the present moment exists. If it is true that God sustains (or at least co-exists with) each successive moment of time, then it follows that He is successively related to each new moment in this way; since times and events come into existence (even for God), then it must be that God enters into a new relation as each moment becomes real in the A-series. Put differently, given the dynamic nature of time, future objects and states of the universe literally do not (yet) exist, which means God is neither causing nor co-existing with them. However, as Craig explains, ‘as God successively sustains each subsequent moment or event in being, He experiences the flow of time and acquires a growing past, as each moment elapses.’\(^{118}\) In other words God’s actions reflect temporal succession. Thus God experiences sequence, which draws Him into time subsequent to creation. This, it is claimed, is so in virtue of God's real relation, not only with the first moment, but with all moments of the temporal universe.\(^{119}\)

Stated succinctly Craig’s claim is that, given

(4) God is creatively active in the temporal world

and the necessary truth of both

(5) If God is creatively active in the temporal world, God is really related to the temporal world, and

(6) If God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal,

then it follows that God is not timeless.\(^{120}\)

\(^{118}\) *God, Time, and Eternity*, p. 60.


Drawing on a familiar theological bifurcation, Craig explains God’s assuming the new relation of *sustaining the universe* or of *co-existing with the universe*, not as an *essential* change in God, but as a merely *accidental* change. According to Aristotle, an essential change occurs ‘when a being is moved which is essentially movable. Essential change includes qualitative alteration and other kinds, which in turn differ among themselves; for example, a thing may be alterable in quality by being healed or heated.’\(^{121}\) Let us say, then, that an essential change in God would consist of a change in God’s very nature (i.e., in his essential properties). A change from being personal to impersonal or a change from being omnibenevolent to being malevolent, for example, would constitute an essential change in God. While affirming that God does indeed change, it is only in relationship to the tensed reality of His creation.\(^{122}\) Craig denies that God changes in his nature and therefore denies that God undergoes essential change.

Taking on this new relationship does, however, realize a change in God’s contingent (i.e., non-essential) properties. Specifically, Craig holds that God changes *intrinsically*. An intrinsic change is a non-relational change involving only the subject (e.g., an apple changes from green to red; Jones was drunk last night but is sober this morning). For example, at the moment of creation, God comes to hold a host of tensed beliefs which he did not have in his atemporal phase.\(^{123}\) Or again, God’s changing from *being atemporal* to *being temporal* is an intrinsic change. Intrinsic change in a thing, it

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\(^{122}\) Alan Padgett’s ‘relative timelessness’ model employs a similar distinction (*God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, p. 124).

\(^{123}\) More on this in chapter four.
should be noted, ‘is neither sufficient nor necessary for that thing’s relation to something else being real.’

Even if acquiring these new relations did not entail intrinsic change in God, he would nevertheless undergo extrinsic change. Extrinsic change is relational change involving something else in relation to which the subject changes (e.g., Socrates becomes shorter than Theaetetus as a result of the latter’s growing; my being 100 miles from Gerald Bray at \( t_1 \) then 50 miles from him at \( t_2 \); Jane’s becoming a widow). Needless to say extrinsic changes, which are frequently referred to as ‘Cambridge changes,’ take time. After all, ‘Theaetetus cannot stand in the relations of being taller than and being shorter than with respect to Socrates at the same time.’ It takes time for Theaetetus to change from being shorter than Socrates to being taller than Socrates. According to Craig, then, even construing God’s becoming Creator and Sustainer of the universe as an extrinsic change is sufficient to require a view that God is within time (at least subsequent to creation).

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124 Craig, *God, Time and Eternity*, p. 73.

125 Perhaps it is helpful to grasp intrinsic change as a change in a subject’s intrinsic properties (where intrinsic properties are those which involve the subject bearing the properties and no one or nothing else, regardless of what properties others may possess) and extrinsic change as change in a subject’s extrinsic properties (where extrinsic properties are a subject’s non-intrinsic properties). Alan Padgett employs a similar distinction in *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1992), pp. 10-12.


128 Thus Craig characterizes God’s relation to the temporal universe as an asymmetrical relation, that is, one that is founded on the intrinsic properties on only one relata.
II. Divine knowledge of tensed facts.

In addition to his argument that God’s real relation to the temporal world and the resultant (at least) extrinsic change He undergoes is sufficient to require a view that God is within time, Craig argues that an omniscient God’s knowledge of tensed facts entails divine temporality. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is a common line of reasoning among temporalists. The claim here is that, given a temporal world wherein, due to the objective process of temporal becoming, tensed facts are in constant flux, God’s perfect knowledge of all temporal facts must also be in constant flux, which implies divine temporal existence.\textsuperscript{129} As Stewart Sutherland observes,

\begin{quote}
[a]s is clear from much contemporary philosophical writing on this subject…worries about the coherence of belief in the omniscience of God have focused primarily on the idea of foreknowledge, and to a lesser extent on knowledge expressed in propositions of the form ‘I am now turning into the South Circular.’\textsuperscript{130}
\end{quote}

It is evident, however, that there are tenseless facts which God, being omniscient, must know. Tenseless facts are those truths that have nothing to do with tense: ‘the Battle of Hastings occurs on 14 October 1066’; ‘Paul takes the Damascus road’; ‘the birth of Jesus precedes the death of Jesus’; ‘Lady Macbeth commits suicide in Act V. scene v’; ‘Loftin writes about tenseless truths on 16 May 2010.’ God also tenselessly knows how each of these are related to one another on the calendar. It is easy enough to see that these verbs are tenseless (not present tense, as they may appear) by attempting to replace them


with their present participial form preceded by the auxiliary verb ‘is’. For example, ‘Paul is taking the Damascus road’ or ‘the Battle of Hastings is occurring on 14 October 1066,’ both of which are, given the dynamic theory, plainly false.

In addition to such tenseless facts there are also tensed facts, that is, facts expressed via tensed verbs or temporal indexicals (i.e., sentences whose propositional content includes tense). For example: ‘It is now $t_n$; ‘I am now turning into the South Circular’; ‘Gerald arrives tomorrow’; ‘The movie starts in three hours’; ‘My wife is reading her book’; ‘Sorry, the train just left.’ Such expressions change with respect to context. If I announce on May 17th that ‘Gerald arrives tomorrow,’ then the indexical ‘tomorrow’ denotes May 18th. However, the same utterance on May 18th would refer to May 19th. Since, as Craig notes, the function of tense is to locate something in relation to the present and the present is constantly changing, the referents of temporal indexicals change.\(^{131}\) It may be suggested that a timeless God might have knowledge of tensed facts in the following way: suppose that an utterance such as ‘Today is February 2nd’ is uttered at 1:30 p.m. on 2 February 2012. By so replacing the indexical ‘today’ with ‘2 February 2012,’ it is suggested, we preserve the full meaning of the proposition. But an atemporal God can easily have knowledge of such non-indexical propositions, and so an atemporal God can still know tensed facts. Indeed, such non-indexical propositions are timelessly true (i.e., if it is ever true, for example, that Keith writes on 2 February 2012, then it is eternally true). This suggestion, however, belies a misunderstanding: the crucial point about tensed facts is their dependence on temporal becoming. In other words, so

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\(^{131}\) Craig, *Time and Eternity*, p. 98.
replacing the indexical ‘today’ does not fully capture the proposition’s meaning.\textsuperscript{132} God can know all propositions of the sort $E$ occurs at $t$, yet still not know whether $E$ occurs now.

To see the difficulty this raises for the atemporalist position, consider an illustration: imagine you’re taking in a mural of the events of the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{133} You see the pre-war raid on Harper’s Ferry, Abraham Lincoln’s being elected as the sixteenth President, the Confederate attack on the Union’s Fort Sumter, the First Battle at Bull Run, the battles at Antietam and Gettysburg, the Union General William Sherman’s ‘March to the Sea,’ and finally Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s surrender at the Appomattox courthouse. Now, imagine that beyond this mural in the round the Civil War is actually raging on. As you take this all in, you are faced with a difficulty: although you can observe the sequence of the events in the mural, you cannot discern which events have already occurred, which are occurring now, and which are yet to occur. This is the difficulty temporalists raise for the conception of God as knowing all of time from within the ‘eternal present.’

The importance of distinguishing between tensed and tenseless expressions cannot be exaggerated. ‘18 May 2010’ always tenselessly denotes the same day. So ‘Gerald arrives at Heathrow on 18 May 2010’ is tenselessly true, regardless of whether it is past, present, or future. The crucial point, however, is that even if one knew this tenseless truth, one would nevertheless not know whether the event had yet occurred unless one also knew whether 18 May 2010 was past or future. On the other hand, the

\textsuperscript{132} Realizing this, some atemporalists—Paul Helm, for example—claim that ‘God has a unique perspective on the world, a perspective necessarily free of temporal…indexicals’ (‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 58).

\textsuperscript{133} This illustration is adapted from Paul Copan, \textit{Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion} (Danvars, MA: Chalice Press, 2007), p. 36.
tensed utterance ‘Gerald arrived at Heathrow on 18 May 2010’ would tell us that his
arrival is past, but it would be false on 18 May 2009 (at which time his arrival would be
future: ‘will arrive’). But given that the present is ever-changing, it follows that tensed
facts are ever-changing, which is why the utterance is true at one time and false at the
other. So we see that tensed expressions convey not merely tenseless facts, but tensed
facts, as well. As Craig sums up:

The upshot is that a being which only knew all tenseless facts about
the world, including which events occur [timelessly] at any date and
time, would still be completely in the dark about tensed facts. He
would have no idea at all of what is now going on in the universe, of
which events are past and which are future. On the other hand, any
being which does know tensed facts cannot be timeless, for his
knowledge must be in constant flux, as the tensed facts known by him
change.\(^\text{134}\)

So, since God does know tensed facts such as that I am now typing this sentence, He
must be temporal, for God could not know this yesterday (indeed, it wasn’t true
yesterday!). Thus God came to know this tensed fact upon it’s becoming true; in a
moment it will no longer be true, and God’s knowledge will change again.\(^\text{135}\)

3.6 Conclusion

We have seen that Craig developed the accidental temporalist model of divine
eternity as a solution to the perennial difficulties facing the traditional atemporalist and
temporalist positions. Particularly as a result of his study of the contingency of the
universe in the thought of the Arabic mutakallimūn, Craig came to focus on the kalām
cosmological argument. Crucial to the defense of that argument is the impossibility of

\(^{134}\) Craig, *Time and Eternity*, p. 99.

\(^{135}\) Detailed defense of this argument may be found in Craig’s ‘Omniscience, Tensed Facts, and Divine
infinite time. Craig’s own contribution to this defense is the distinction between the notions of the actual and the potential infinite. Though the actual infinite is consistent and useful within the purely mental realm of mathematics, Craig argues that the actual infinite is metaphysically impossible in the real world of concrete objects (as illustrated in the absurdity of Hilbert’s Hotel). If this is so, then it follows that the collection of discrete, prior events (i.e., history) must have a beginning, because an infinite temporal regress of events would be an actual infinite. This conclusion naturally raises the question of God’s relation to the first event and therefore God’s relation to time.

As with his medieval predecessors, Craig emphasizes the important interplay between the doctrine of divine eternity and the philosophy of time. Employing McTaggart’s distinction between the static and dynamic theories of time, Craig makes considerable effort to reject the static view in favor of the dynamic view of time, arguing that temporal becoming is an objectively real (mind-independent) feature of temporal reality; temporal becoming is an ineradicable feature of the phenomenology of our common experience; only the dynamic view can account for the asymmetry and directionality of time; tense is an ineliminable feature of our experience; the B-series of events is made possible only by the prior positing of the A-series (i.e., A-determinations are more fundamental than B-determinations); and the Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo requires a dynamic conception of time. For these reasons Craig affirms the dynamic theory: neither the past nor the future exist; only present events and times are real. That the static and dynamic theories are mutually exclusive theories that posit contradictory metaphysical realities is significant because it rules out well-meaning but confused attempts to maintain both the static and the dynamic nature of temporal reality.
Given that there was a first moment of time at some point in the finite past, that
time is dynamic in nature, and that God did not begin to exist, the accidental temporalist
reasons that there is, *sans* creation, no time to which God could be related, and that in
such a state therefore God must be timeless. This is not to be understood as the claim that
God existed temporally before the universe, for in the absence of time there can be no
temporal ‘before.’ Rather, *sans* creation the Persons of the Trinity changelessly co-exist
in a state of *perichoresis*, from which it follows that God’s free creative act at the first
moment of time constitutes the first event. Since God was free to create or not to create,
we see that God’s temporal status is a contingent not a necessary property, that is, God’s
temporal mode can change (hence ‘accidental temporalism’). According to Craig, time
itself came into existence at creation, with God entering into time in virtue of his real
relations (of sustaining the temporal universe, or at least of co-existing with that universe)
with that creation. Moreover, an omniscient God’s knowledge of tensed facts, which are
in constant flux, entails divine temporality. Thus by His act of creation, God changed
from being atemporal to being temporal.

Several philosophical objections have been raised against accidental temporalism.
In chapter four I shall examine these objections and consider whether accidental
temporalism can withstand such scrutiny.
CHAPTER 4: Philosophical Challenges to Accidental Temporalism

4.1 Introduction

We turn now to a consideration of several philosophical challenges to Craig’s theory. Can Craig’s accidental temporalism withstand close, rigorous philosophical examination? If any objection to it were to prove decisive, it is clear that accidental temporalism—at least as it has been articulated thus far—would have to be rejected. This chapter will address the weightier objections to accidental temporalism that have been advanced from a purely analytical philosophical position. I first consider two objections to the effect that accidental temporalism is fairly obviously incoherent and may therefore be peremptorily rejected. This charge is leveled at accidental temporalism’s timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation locution. In the first instance, William Hasker argues that accidental temporalism runs afoul of a dilemma: either God’s timeless phase does not cease, or if it does then there can be no state of affairs God is timeless sans creation. In the second instance, it is objected that accidental temporalism boils down to the claim that God’s timeless phase is in time, which is unintelligible. Both forms of this recurrent objection, I shall argue, are fatally flawed. This ‘peremptory objection’ therefore fails. The second half of the chapter is concerned with a somewhat more sophisticated objection, namely, that accidental temporalism falls victim to an internal inconsistency: a robust doctrine of omniscience appears to undermine the A-theory of time. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, though, accidental temporalism is dependent upon the A-theory of time. In order to rebut this charge, it will be necessary to
explore the constitutive temporal determinations of the tensed theory. I shall argue that a proper understanding of these determinations vis-à-vis creation renders the dilemma false, thereby preserving the compatibility of divine omniscience and accidental temporalism. The proposed solution, however, raises one final challenge: whether, in avoiding the dilemma, we have rendered God’s omniscience \textit{sans} creation insubstantial. I shall argue that, given the radical doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo}, God \textit{sans} creation cannot possess knowledge of either A- or B-properties. It will be demonstrated, however, that this is no threat to omniscience. Responding to these various objections will bring further clarity to accidental temporalism.

4.2 Two Peremptory Objections

Recall Craig’s summary statement of his accidental temporalism:

[I]f time had a beginning at some point in the finite past, it follows that God sans the universe exists atemporally, even if subsequent to the moment of creation He is temporal…[O]n such a view there seem to be two phases of God’s life, which stand to each other in a relation of earlier/later than. But a timeless phase can hardly be coherently said to exist earlier than a temporal phase of God’s life…[so] given a tensed theory of time, God’s temporal status cannot remain unaffected by His creation of a temporal universe. Given God’s real relation to the world, God must, subsequent to creation, be temporal.\footnote{William Lane Craig, \textit{God, Time and Eternity} (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), p. 267.}

In other words since God was free to refrain from creating the temporal universe, He is contingently timeless \textit{sans} creation. Unfortunately, Craig’s choice of language is potentially misleading. The acknowledgment that ‘on such a view there seem to be two phases of God’s life, which stand to each other in a relation of earlier/later than’ may be read as presenting an insuperable difficulty for accidental temporalism. For example, one way of reading Craig seems to fuel Paul Helm’s worry that ‘[Craig] betokens
misunderstanding of the eternalist position, if the “before” is intended as a temporal before, as it clearly is.  While much more will be said below regarding a formalized version of the objection hinted at, our exposition of Craig’s view in the last chapter indicates that his intended meaning is that on accidental temporalism there seem to be two phases of God’s life, which stand to each other in a relation of earlier/later than—but despite appearances the two phases are not to be regarded as standing in a relation of earlier/later than.

4.2.1 The Disturbed Timelessness Objection

In his review of Craig’s work, William Hasker complains of Craig’s ‘perplexing assertion’ that God’s timelessness sans creation and temporality subsequent to creation are not temporally related. Indeed, Hasker thinks ‘this verges on sheer incoherence.’

Given Craig’s characterization of God’s existing timelessly sans creation as ‘entirely alone, utterly changeless and perfect [with] not a single event disturbing His immobility…no before, no after, no temporal passage, no future phase of His life,’ Hasker asks:

Does God’s atemporal phase not end with the creation? Is this not an event which ‘disturbs His immobility?’ If the atemporal phase did not end, then it would be true at present to say that God exists atemporally as well as temporally—but this clearly is not Craig’s meaning.

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2 Paul Helm, ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ in God and Time: Four Views, p. 49. In the recent publication of a second edition of his Eternal God (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Helm relaxes his objection along these lines though still rejecting accidental temporalism.


4 Craig, God, Time, and Eternity, p. 271.

5 God, Time, and Eternity, p. 271.
Though he does not present it formally as such, Hasker seems to imply that Craig is on the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand, if God’s timelessness does not cease, then God must now be both timeless and temporal. Given that this is contradictory,\(^6\) accidental temporalists would reject this alternative. On the other hand, Hasker intimates that if God’s timeless phase does cease, then this violates Craig’s own characterization of this phase as perfect immobility. So it appears Hasker’s dilemma is not aimed specifically at the relation between the two proposed phases, but rather at Craig’s seemingly inadequate conception of timelessness. Hasker’s objection has thus far gone unanswered. I shall advance the discussion by offering an alternative reading of Craig.

Suppose the accidental temporalist answers each of Hasker’s questions in the affirmative. Doing so does not invite the disastrous consequences Hasker seems to anticipate (as I shall argue later). Indeed, answering in the affirmative is only problematic if one assumes that God must be *essentially* timeless. But, given Craig’s claim that God is *contingently* timeless, this is the fundamental point at dispute. Of course if God were essentially timeless then His timeless phase could not cease.

It seems to me that Hasker’s objection is motivated by a misreading of Craig. When he writes that, ‘God existing *sans* creation is entirely alone, utterly changeless and perfect, and not a single event disturbs His immobility,’ Craig does not mean that God’s timelessness is imperturbable. He does not mean that nothing *can* disturb God’s timeless immobility, only that nothing *does*. But clearly God’s immobility can be ‘disturbed’ if there are events, for example, if a created world begins to exist. This would explain why Craig is keen to say that God’s timeless phase exists *sans* creation. In other words, this is

\(^{6}\) The reader may find it helpful to refer back to the discussion on the mutual exclusiveness of the timeless and temporal positions on pp. 14-17 of this thesis.
meant as an elaboration on God’s timeless phase: in His timelessness, there is no change, no events. Perhaps a fitting analogy is the way in which we ordinarily conceive of the universe qua singularity. That the universe qua singularity is perfectly immobile and timeless does not preclude the universe qua cosmos from ceasing to be so subsequent to the Big Bang. So, when an event occurs, God is not in his timeless state (for, assuming a relational view of time which Craig espouses the occurrence of an event entails there is time\(^7\)). Once an event occurs, God is in time. In short, Craig’s point is that the conjunction of ‘God is timeless’ and ‘events are occurring’ cannot be affirmed. With this clarification of Craig in mind, there is found no incoherence in the accidental temporalist’s claim that God’s timeless immobility is disturbed and God’s timeless mode does cease.

4.2.2 The Before-After Incoherence Objection

Even if this understanding of God’s timeless phase proves viable, Craig’s detractors have insisted that his characterization of the relation between the proposed two phases of God’s life—timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation—is not coherent. This must be so, they claim, because God’s timeless phase must be temporally before God’s temporal phase.

Brian Leftow, for example, in addressing the claim that God becomes temporal by creating time, argues that this must be interpreted to mean that ‘God’s life has first a timeless and then a temporal part.’\(^8\) This, he asserts, would involve an obvious difficulty:


God’s timeless phase would be ‘before’ his temporal phase. ‘If \( t \) is a time at which God is timeless (as distinct from a time at which it is true to say that God is timeless),’ explains Leftow, ‘then God’s timeless state, supposedly not earlier than anything, is earlier than every time after \( t \).’\(^9\) Given that whatever is earlier than something else is therefore in time, Leftow insists that accidental temporalism incoherently holds that ‘before there was time, God was timeless and not temporal, and once there was time, God was temporal and not timeless.’\(^10\)

In his response to Craig’s accidental temporalism, Paul Helm expresses a similar concern. Addressing specifically Craig’s explanation of God as timeless *sans* creation, Helm attributes to Craig the view that pre-creation ‘there is time but it cannot be divided into intervals,’ which view Helm thinks implies ‘that the whole of time before the creation must be one indivisible interval, earlier than the time of creation.’\(^11\) Thus, claims Helm, ‘if someone exists either timelessly or in time, and exists before some temporal states of affairs, then this is a good, indeed a pretty conclusive reason for saying that that individual is also in time.’\(^12\)

This criticism of Craig amounts to much the same charge leveled by Leftow: if there are two phases of God’s life, one timeless and one temporal, then we must suppose that the one is temporally prior to the other. Echoing Leftow and Helm, Garrett DeWeese concludes:

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\(^9\) ‘Eternity,’ p. 259.
\(^10\) ‘Eternity,’ p. 259.
\(^12\) ‘Response to William Lane Craig,’ p. 164. Norman Geisler and H. Wayne House similarly question accidental temporalism because ‘it is…incoherent to speak of God being eternal before creation and temporal after creation’ (*The Battle for God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001], p. 96).
Given the opaque nature of the relation between the two phases of God’s existence, we may well ask if Craig has given a coherent view. It seems that God both is and is not in different states, is and is not temporally relating to his creatures, is and is not engaged in the act of creation… The confusion only grows deeper.\(^\text{13}\)

This objection, which I dub the ‘before-after incoherence objection,’ has so far gone unanswered in the literature. I shall further the discussion by formally developing and analyzing the objection, ultimately arguing that it is unsound.

The objection clearly turns on whether the relation between God’s being timeless and God’s being temporal must in fact be a temporal relation. Craig’s contention that God’s temporal mode changes, it is objected, is seemingly logically incoherent, for if the one phase is (temporally) before the other, then both must be temporal (for as Leftow notes, ‘whatever is earlier than something else is in time’ and Helm echoes that ‘temporal affairs come after it’) and Craig’s view is rendered absurd. On the other hand, if God’s timeless phase is not ended by the beginning of His temporal phase then God is at present both timeless and temporal, which is again incoherent. Though Craig’s published work makes no explicit response to this objection, I want to argue that this central claim of accidental temporalism is defensible.

More formally, the objection is best expressed as a reductio ad absurdum:

(1) There are two phases of God’s life: timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation (assumption of accidental temporalism)

(2) If God’s life has two phases (timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation), then God’s timeless phase is earlier than His temporal phase (definition of [1])

(3) Whatever is earlier than something else is in time (premise)

(4) Therefore, God’s timeless phase is in time, which is absurd.

**On ‘Phases’ Talk**

An initial point of clarification concerns the use of the term ‘phases’ in describing God’s timelessness *sans* creation and temporality subsequent to creation. The idea seems to be that we can elucidate the relation between God’s ‘timelessness *sans* creation’ and ‘temporality subsequent to creation’ as a purely logical one. But precisely how this is to be understood has never been made sufficiently clear. I shall consider several possible meanings before offering what seems to me a suitable understanding.

It might be thought that the difficulty is actually a pseudo-problem. One may be tempted to explain the relation of the two phases exclusively in terms of a merely Cambridge change.\(^{14}\) In other words, perhaps the language of ‘phases’ is not to be taken literally. If the change from timeless to temporal is really a merely Cambridge change, then there is no real change within God at all. If that is the case, then the only real change is confined to the temporal becoming of the universe. The universe’s coming to be is not itself, nor does it constitute, a change within God. It does, however, constitute a *relational* change for God. When pressed, the language of ‘phases’ therefore breaks down. After all, on this understanding ‘phases’ would seemingly denote a purely conceptual distinction, one aimed at highlighting God’s Cambridge properties vis-à-vis the universe. If this is so, it may be that the language of ‘phases’ is, to Craig’s objectors, suggestive of a sort of change in God he does not intend. Though intriguing, this solution

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\(^{14}\) The reader will recall from chapter three that ‘Cambridge changes’ are extrinsic changes such as Socrates’ becoming shorter than Theaetetus as a result of the latter’s growing, my being 100 miles from Gerald Bray at \(t_1\) then 50 miles from him at \(t_2\), and Jane’s becoming a widow.
fails, because Craig does affirm intrinsic change in God, not in virtue of standing in new relations with creation, but in virtue of His knowledge changing as propositions change in truth-value over time.\textsuperscript{15}

Given the failure of that solution, it may be tempting to identify the claim that God exists \textit{sans} creation as simply talk of a possible world $W_1$ in which God exists and creation does not obtain. God’s existence in such a state of affairs would plausibly be characterized by timelessness since no creation obtains for him to be really related to and thus be brought into the temporal order.\textsuperscript{16} It may also be tempting to identify the claim that God exists temporally alongside creation as simply talk of another possible world $W_2$ in which God exists and creation does obtain. Since $W_2$ obtains (and $W_1$ does not), then on this account $W_2$ would be, presumably, the actual world. While this explanation may be suitable for most versions of omnitemporality, it is unsatisfactory for accidental temporalism. Certainly the accidental temporalist will agree that there are such possible worlds, but Craig’s theory aims to conceive of God \textit{sans} creation and God with creation in the same—the actual—world. What Craig proposes is a possible world $W_3$ in which God creates a temporal universe and two states of affairs obtain:

\begin{enumerate}
\item It is the case that \textit{sans} creation God exists timelessly, and
\item It is the case that with creation God exists temporally.
\end{enumerate}

Since the \textit{exists} of (5) is tenseless and the \textit{exists} of (6) is tensed, these states of affairs do not obtain simultaneously (indeed, [5] does not obtain at any time).

\textsuperscript{15} We will return to this claim in the second half of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{16} It might be objected that the obtaining of creation is not, in fact, necessary to temporalize God (though it may be sufficient to do so). For present purposes, though, let us lay that point aside.
Craig’s usage of the objectionable language of ‘phases’ is complicated by the fact that the very concept of a ‘phase’ seems laden with temporal connotations. But since Craig is careful to deny that the two suggested phases of God’s life are temporally related, he must suppose that there is some other way to explain positively the relation between them. Critics have protested, though, that Craig fails to explain precisely how the phases are related. In the absence of some non-temporal explanation of the relation (besides the mere denial that it is a temporal relation), such critics are not to be blamed for thinking the phases must be temporally related. Nevertheless, it seems we can conceive of a relation between the phases such that God’s timeless phase is not temporally before His temporal phase.

Though he offers little in his published work regarding such an explanation, Craig does suggest that God’s timeless phase ‘is a boundary of time which is causally…prior to the origin of the universe.’ The claim is that the phases share a boundary relation: God’s timelessness _sans_ creation bounds God’s temporality subsequent to creation.

Once again an analogy from physical time may prove instructive. Craig writes:

In standard Big Bang cosmology, the initial cosmological singularity at which the universe…begins is not conceived to be an instant or any other part of time, but rather to constitute a boundary to time. Thus it cannot be said technically to be earlier than the universe, and yet it is causally prior to the universe.

Thus understood, the initial singularity is a timeless state. As physicist Sean Carroll observes, such a timeless state makes perfect sense. He explains:

"we can easily imagine self-contained descriptions of the universe that have an earliest moment of time. There is no logical or metaphysical obstacle to completing the conventional temporal history of the

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17 Craig, _God, Time and Eternity_, p. 272.
18 _God, Time and Eternity_, p. 272.
universe by including an atemporal boundary condition at the beginning. Together with the successful post-Big-Bang cosmological model already in our possession, that would constitute a consistent and self-contained description of the history of the universe.\textsuperscript{19}

The idea, then, is that God’s timelessness \textit{sans} creation is, like the initial singularity, neither contemporaneous with nor earlier than the creation. According to Craig, with creation God becomes temporal. So God’s timeless phase is a boundary for His temporal phase, which, as we have seen, is a perfectly coherent, non-temporal relation.

Perhaps another analogy, this time from geometry, will help elucidate the relation. In private communication Craig further explains that the phases are related such that one encounters the timeless phase by proceeding as far as possible in the earlier-than direction within the temporal phase. In other words, suppose the time is now $t_5$. If we regress temporally in equal intervals through time, in the manner $t_5, t_4, t_3, \ldots \text{then at the first moment of time}, t_0, \text{one would encounter God’s timeless phase. By so doing one reaches the atemporal phase as a boundary to the temporal phase. This is similar to the way in which a boundary point is related to a manifold. Consider, for example, the ray on the number line consisting of the set of all the positive real numbers (figure one):}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\scalebox{0.5}{
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[->] (0,0) -- (10,0);
\foreach \x in {0,1,2,3}
\draw[thick] (\x,0.2) -- (\x,-0.2) node[below] {$\x$};
\draw (0,0) circle (0.1cm);\node[above] at (0,0) {0};
\end{tikzpicture}}
\end{figure}

Not being a positive number, zero is not a member of the set of positive real numbers (and is therefore represented with the open circle symbol). The zero point is, however, a boundary point for the ray—in fact, its only boundary point. Though zero, being just a

\textsuperscript{19} Sean Carroll, ‘Does the Universe Need God?’ Forthcoming in \textit{The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity}. 178
point, has no dimension, it is clearly ‘next to’ the set of positive real numbers in an important sense. More precisely,

(7) if you were to pick any positive real number, (a) it would be a member of the set of positive real numbers, and (b) some of the members of the set would be smaller than that number, so it would not be a boundary, and

(8) if you were to pick any negative real number, then (a) there would be at least one number that came between your chosen negative number and any of the positive real numbers—namely, zero—and (b) that fact would disqualify the negative number you picked from being a boundary (because it cannot be ‘next to’ the positive real numbers if there are other numbers between it and the positive real numbers).  

The upshot of this is that it again seems perfectly sensible to say that zero, though not a member of the set of positive real numbers, is nevertheless a boundary for it. But this is, again, what Craig claims for the relation of God’s timeless phase to His temporal phase: the latter is bounded by the former. The set of positive real numbers is analogous to God’s temporal phase with creation, while the zero point is analogous to God’s timeless phase sans creation.

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20 The shudder quotes around ‘next to’ are necessary, because strictly speaking there is no least member in the interval.

21 The ‘greater than’ relation here is a strict order relation: it is irreflexive (it is never the case that xRx), antisymmetric (if xRy, then ¬yRx), transitive (if xRy and yRz, then xRz), and weakly connected (for any x and y such that ¬(x=y), either xRy or yRx). I am very grateful to Timothy McGrew for his assistance in formulating this example.
By my lights this explanation successfully demonstrates that there is no incoherence in conceiving of God’s two phases as not temporally related. It also offers a means of clearly distinguishing one phase from the other. This, it seems to me, is as perspicuous a positive account of how God’s timeless phase relates to God’s temporal phase as one may reasonably desire. If this is so, then nothing further is needed to assuage the objectors’ concerns about incoherence.

Responding to the Before-After Incoherence Objection

In light of the foregoing discussion, we can now consider the soundness of what I shall call the ‘before-after incoherence objection.’ Let us consider each premise of the argument. Premise (1), being merely a summative expression of accidental temporalism, is unobjectionable. Premise (3) seems straightforwardly true: if something, say, event A is earlier than event B, then surely A is in time (otherwise we are hard pressed to make sense of the utterance ‘earlier than’). The conclusion in (4) follows on the heels of the three premises, so clearly the objection’s heavy lifting occurs in premise (2).

In order for the objection to be sound, premise (2) must be true. The claim that there are two phases of God’s life—timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation—is central to accidental temporalism. The pivotal question is whether that claim must be taken to mean that God’s timeless phase is literally (temporally) earlier than His temporal phase. Conspicuously absent from each expression of the objection, however, is any positive defense of (2). Moreover, we have Craig’s explicit claims to the contrary: ‘a timeless phase can hardly be coherently said to exist earlier than a temporal phase of
God’s life.’ Yet Craig’s detractors assume this interpretation. Paul Helm, for example, insists that Craig ‘betokens misunderstanding of the eternalist position, if the “before” [of God’s timeless phase] is intended as a temporal before, as it clearly is.’ What is needed to justify this insistence, as well as to preserve the soundness of the objection, is a view of time that accommodates pre-creation time, that is, a view other than the relational view Craig holds. Yet detractors of Craig’s position have overlooked this point. Though I leave it to them to defend alternatives, I offer a few words on what seems the most obvious choice: the unbounded view of time.

The Unbounded View of Time

The so-called ‘unbounded’ view of time holds that time is infinite in both directions. The most well-known and capable proponent of this view is Richard Swinburne, who defends it in (among other places) his book *Space and Time.*

Swinburne thinks that, for any given period of time ending at some instant, there must be a subsequent period, which in turn implies that every instant must be followed by another instant. But why think this? According to Swinburne:

[E]ither there will be swans somewhere subsequent to a period T, or there will not. In either case there must be a period subsequent to T, during which there will or will not be swans. By an analogous argument any period which has a beginning must have been preceded by another period, and hence time is necessarily unbounded...Since time is of logical necessity unbounded, it must therefore of logical necessity be infinite. Since before every period of time having a beginning and after every period of time having an end there must be

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24 For present purposes we may grant Craig’s identification of the first event with creation.
another period, and since the same instant and so period never returns, there is no limit to time. It has gone on and will go on forever.26

Swinburne’s reasoning suggests a correlative argument for the past infinity of time. This would run something like:

Before every period of time which has at some instant a beginning, there must be another period of time, and so before every instant another instant. For either there were swans somewhere prior to a period $T$, or there were not. In either case there must be a period prior to $T$, during which there were or were not swans.

Swinburne elsewhere clarifies his theory by defending, as he puts it, ‘four modest verificationist theses’:

[F]irst…all talk about events occurring at instants is reducible to talk about events occurring over periods. The second is that instants are the instants they are in virtue of the periods which they bound. The third is that periods are the periods they are in virtue of the actual or possible events which end when they begin, and begin when they end. The fourth is that the length of a temporal interval is the length which would be measured by a perfect clock.27

On this view the most ‘the universe had a beginning’ can mean is something akin to ‘the Universe had a beginning if first there was empty time, and then there were substances.’28

On this understanding, given the absence of objects with which to distinguish temporal intervals, time is metrically amorphous.29 In other words, the universe had a beginning only if a finite time ago, after a period of empty (i.e., metrically amorphous) time, there were substances. The upshot of Swinburne’s theory, then, is that time has no beginning or end: before every period of time having as a beginning some instant, there is (of logical necessity) another period of time.

28 ‘The Beginning of the Universe and of Time,’ p. 185.
It is difficult to see how the truth of premise (2)—if God’s life has two phases (timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation), then God’s timeless phase is earlier than His temporal phase—could be established apart from some such theory of time.\(^{30}\) The only conceivable grounds upon which one may insist that ‘God’s timeless phase must be literally (temporally) prior to his temporal phase’ is if both phases are in time, for were the timeless phase not in time then it could hardly be temporally prior to anything. If time is, as Swinburne argues, unbounded (and thus infinite), then the two phases of God’s life would both have to be in time and separated or distinguished from one another, say, by the moment of creation. Given the unbounded view of time, Craig’s claim that ‘God’s life has two phases’ must amount to the claim that ‘God first existed changelessly alone through empty time in the absence of any substances,’ then ‘at and following the moment of creation God exists simultaneously with substances.’ If this analysis were accurate, then the objection would be sound and accidental temporalism would indeed be rendered incoherent.

Those familiar with Craig’s defense of the *kalām* cosmological argument will, perhaps, consider his arguments there strong *prima facie* reasons to reject Swinburne’s argument for the past infinitude of time.\(^{31}\) Let us lay that aside, though, and consider Swinburne’s argument on its own merits. Interestingly, the strongest support Swinburne

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\(^{30}\) One might worry that, even if the unbounded view is rejected, perhaps God’s two phases overlap (in some sense) at the first moment. Given a relational view (see below), however, this worry is founded on a misunderstanding. On such a view, time—including the first moment—is logically posterior to some event. According to Craig, by creating a first event out of timeless eternity, God creates a first moment of time (cf. Craig’s discussion in ‘Timelessness and Creation,’ *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 [1996]: 650ff). Thus, the worry either presupposes the (problematic) unbounded view of time, or (more likely) conflates God’s creating a first event with the resulting first moment of time.

\(^{31}\) One might object that, strictly speaking, the *kalām* argument demonstrates not the finitude of *time*, but merely the finitude of the *universe*. Regardless, the argument is easily retooled to apply to past periods of (equal lengths of) time (cf. Craig’s *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* [London: Macmillan, 1979], pp. 106f).
offers for why we ought to agree that before every period having an instantaneous beginning (and after every period having an instantaneous end) there must be another period and thus another instant is his argument that ‘either there were swans somewhere prior to a period $T$, or there were not.’ The idea is that for some period $T$, in order for there to have been swans somewhere prior to $T$, then there must have existed some period $T_1$ during which there were swans. Conversely, in order for there not to have been swans somewhere prior to $T$, some period $T_1$ must still have existed during which there were not swans. So Swinburne’s claim is that regardless of whether there were or were not swans somewhere prior to $T$, there must have been a period $T_1$ prior to $T$.

Although initially appealing, on closer examination Swinburne’s argument is seen to be question begging. One can only claim there either were or were not swans prior to $T$ if there were a period $T_1$ during which there could be swans. Yet Swinburne assumes what he sets out to prove: the existence of some period prior to $T$ during which there were or were not swans. As Quentin Smith remarks,

[Swinburne’s] assertion does not prove that prior to any period $T$ there was a time, but assumes it. Suppose this assumption be denied; in this case for some period $T$ there was no prior period, and consequently the disjunction, “either there were or were not swans prior to $T$,” is false. In this instance, it is true that swans existed if at all only at $T$ or some later time, but this entails, not that no swans existed prior to $T$, but that there was no prior period in which swans either existed or did not exist.\(^\text{32}\)

Smith goes on to point out that the form of Swinburne’s argument

either there is an $x$ that is $F$, or there is an $x$ that is not $F$; in either case, there must be an $x$

could be used to demonstrate the existence of all manner of absurdities. For example:

either there is a unicorn which is walking on the moon, or there is a unicorn which is not walking on the moon; in either case there must be a unicorn.\(^{33}\)

In the absence of any successful supporting argument, there is no reason to think that before every period having an instantaneous beginning (and after every period having an instantaneous end) there must be another period and thus another instant. But given the rejection of the unbounded view, there is no compelling reason to posit pre-creation time. As Craig rejoins,

to say that time began to exist is not to assert the self-contradiction that prior to \(t=0\) there were times at which time did not exist, but to claim, as Quentin Smith points out, that (i) there is a finite interval of time such that every other interval of the same length is later than that interval and (ii) prior to any interval of a given finite length there is at most a finite number of intervals of the same length.\(^{34}\)

The before-after objection’s crucial second premise thus lacks support, which renders unsound the objection that Craig’s ‘timeless \textit{sans} creation, temporal subsequent to creation’ locution is incoherent. Nevertheless, having concluded that the peremptory objection to accidental temporalism is unconvincing, we may ask to what conception of time might Craig appeal in order to avoid incoherence?

\subsection*{4.3 The ‘Relational’ View of Time}

In this section I shall consider two alternatives to the unbounded theory of time, either of which would provide a sturdy foundation for accidental temporalism. These are two fundamentally opposed conceptions of just what exactly time is. Some philosophers,

\begin{flushright}
\begin{minipage}{0.95\textwidth}
\textsuperscript{33} On the Beginning of Time,’ 581.
\textsuperscript{34} William Lane Craig, ‘The Origin and Creation of the Universe: A Reply to Adolf Grünbaum,’ \textit{The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science} 43:2 (1992): 238.
\end{minipage}
\end{flushright}
such as Swinburne, conceive of time as a sort of empty container within which things may exist, relations obtain, or events occur. On this model there was, perhaps, a moment at which the universe began, but this needn’t amount to anything more than the imposition of a metric upon time; at most, the beginning of the universe was the first event to occur within time.³⁵ Time does not, therefore, depend upon change (or any contingent thing) for its existence. This is known as the substantivalist view. As Carl Hoefer explains:

a modern-day substantivalist thinks that space-time is a kind of thing which can, in consistency with the laws of nature, exist independently of material things (ordinary matter, light, and so on) and which is properly described as having its own properties, over and above the properties of any material things that may occupy parts of it.³⁶

According to substantivalism about time, time’s existence is completely independent of things, relations, or events. This conception stands in sharp contrast to the so-called relational view of time.³⁷

As we saw in the previous chapter, Craig characterizes the nature of time in accordance with the A-theory. The question now before us, however, is more fundamental: what, if any, conception of time will allow Craig to coherently maintain that there are two phases of God’s life—timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation—which are not related to each other as earlier/later than? In his written works,

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³⁵ Recall from chapter one that by the ‘metric’ of time we mean the absolute value of some interval of time, that is, the basis for determining temporal distance.


³⁷ For helpful elaboration on this distinction, see Lawrence Sklar, Philosophy and Spacetime Physics (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 9.
Craig, following the seventeenth century German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, frequently appeals to the relational view of time to underwrite his claim.

In his famous correspondence with Samuel Clarke, who unwaveringly defended the Newtonian concept of absolute time, Leibniz argued that ‘if there were no creatures, space and time would be only in the ideas of God.’ Later clarifying his view, Leibniz wrote:

If there were no creatures, there would be neither time nor place, and consequently no actual space. The immensity of God is independent upon space, as his eternity is independent upon time. These attributes signify only [with regard to those two orders of things] that God would be present and coexistent with all the things that should exist. And therefore I don’t admit what’s here alleged, that if God existed alone, there would be time and space as there is now: whereas then, in my opinion, they would be only in the ideas of God as mere possibilities.

Leibniz was therefore an early proponent of the so-called relational view of time. The relational view of time, according to Dutch philosopher P. J. Zwart, holds that:

[t]ime does not exist in itself, but only in the events and processes that take place. Time thus is relative in this sense that the events are fundamental and time is nothing but a concept based on certain relations among events.

In other words, time does not exist independently. What existence time has, rather, is had solely as a result of the occurrence of events. As Zwart explains:

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38 On the issue of space and time…much of (Clarke’s) views are expressed in the midst of others regarding different topics, for example, the proof for the existence of God or the extension of the soul…The picture that emerges, however, is virtually identical to Newton’s, to whose views he often referred’ (Ezio Vailati, Leibniz & Clarke: A Study of Their Correspondence [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], p. 109).


Without events there would be no time; in a universe where absolutely nothing would happen, no time would ‘flow’ either. Events do not just have their places in time, like pieces of wood floating in a river, but the flow of time is nothing but the flow of events.⁴²

In short, ‘time is the generalized relation of before-and-after extended to all events.’⁴³

The upshot of the relational view of time, then, is that in the absence of events there is no time, and once there are events, time is merely the relation(s) among them. This relational understanding resonates with Aristotle’s intuitive claim that ‘time cannot exist without change.’⁴⁴ Craig’s agreement is apparent. He writes, ‘it does seem plausible to contend on a relational view of time that a first instant could exist, since apart from events no time exists.’⁴⁵ Or again: ‘with the creation of the universe, time began.’⁴⁶ This, says Craig, suggests the principle

(P) Necessarily, if a first event occurs, times exist only at or after the occurrence of that event,

which implies ‘there is no “before” relative to a first event and, hence, no empty time prior to a first event.’⁴⁷ This amounts to a clear rejection of the substantivalist view of time in favor of the relational view.

Is there, on a relational view of time, any incoherence in Craig’s suggestion that there are two phases of God’s life—timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation? Helm’s charge that, given the accidental temporalist’s view, God’s timeless

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⁴⁴ Aristotle, Physics, 218b.21.
⁴⁷ Craig, ‘God and the Beginning of Time,’ p. 31.
phase must be understood as *temporally* before God’s temporal phase, appears to be false. For on a relational view of time, there literally *is no* ‘before’ the first event. As Craig explains, ‘on a relational view of time, God would exist changelessly and timelessly prior to the first event, creation, which marks the beginning of time.’

Were God to change prior to the creation event, then we could meaningfully speak of a before and after that change (since this is all that is needed to generate time). In the absence of any such change prior to creation, however, there is literally no time to which God could be related; in the absence of events, there is no before and after. Thus, *sans* creation, God must be timeless. As extraordinary as it may seem, then, we cannot sensibly speak of God’s timeless phase as being ‘earlier than’ or ‘temporally before’ God’s temporal phase, for there can be no ‘earlier than’ the first moment of time. The corollary of this is that on a relational view of time we cannot sensibly speak of God’s temporal phase as being ‘later than’ or ‘temporally after’ God’s timeless phase. Since time began at creation, there was no time when God was not temporal. There appears, therefore, no incoherence in claiming there are two phases of God’s life—timeless *sans* creation, temporal subsequent to creation—which are not related to each other as earlier/later than.

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Craig, ‘God, Time, and Eternity,’ p. 502. Garrett DeWeese, in his discussion of the flow of time, attributes the substantivalist view to Craig. In the course of his discussion, DeWeese asks, ‘if no easy explanation of why time flows is forthcoming, might we not simply take time as a metaphysical primitive? We might simply claim that it is a brute, unanalyzable fact about time that it flows, or that passage is an intrinsic essential property of time’ (*God and the Nature of Time*, p. 39). DeWeese goes on to attribute this view to Craig: ‘This is the approach of Craig, who adopts a substantivalist view of time.’ But this is premature. Craig’s strategy in defending accidental temporalism is to explore its compatibility with both the substantival and relational views, ultimately remaining neutral on the matter. Indeed, Craig maintains accidental temporalism’s compatibility with both views, though he himself affirms the relational view: ‘On the view I have defended, God sans the world would exist changelessly and, given some relational view of time, therefore timelessly and at the Big Bang singularity create both the universe and concomitantly, time’ (*God, Time, and Eternity*, p. 276).
4.4 Accidental Temporalism and Omniscience: Two Worries

The upshot of my argument so far in this chapter has been that there is no logical incoherence in claiming that God is ‘timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation.’ But perhaps another important potential problem for accidental temporalism concerns God’s omniscience. In seeking to preserve the traditionally high conception of omniscience, Craig proposes the following definition:

(O) For any agent $x$, $x$ is omniscient = \text{def} For every statement $s$, if $s$ is true, then $x$ knows that $s$ and does not believe not-$s$.\footnote{William Lane Craig, ‘What Does God Know?’ in God Under Fire, eds. Douglas Huffman and Eric Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. 146 (cf. Craig’s discussion in God & Time: Four Views, pp. 145-151).}

This definition preserves our intuition that, whatever else we say of it, omniscience at least means that God believes all and only true propositions. As we saw in the previous chapter, in the absence of creation there is no tensed reality and thus no tensed truths. Even if God, sans creation, knows tenseless truths such as that on 26 February 2011 Keith Loftin types on his computer, yet he does not and indeed cannot know that Keith Loftin is now typing on his computer. Sans creation, there is no such fact Keith Loftin is now typing on his computer. Recall the argument from last chapter: given the creation of a tensed universe (i.e., of a universe in which the dynamic theory of time is true) there come to be, perhaps in addition to tenseless facts, facts whose propositional content includes tense, which an omniscient God must know. So, since God must know all tensed facts (which are in constant flux), subsequent to creation his knowledge is also constantly changing and God is therefore temporal.
The conclusion that subsequent to creation God’s knowledge is constantly changing and God is therefore temporal accentuates an interesting facet of accidental temporalism. We have seen that in the absence of time, there is no literal future or past.

‘Therefore,’ as Craig explains, sans creation

any future-tense propositions that exist must be uniformly false. Is God sans creation therefore ignorant of what happens once he creates the world? No, for he knows all tenselessly true propositions sans creation…At the moment of creation myriad future-tense propositions suddenly switch truth-values, and God believes only and all those that are true.\(^{50}\)

In his timelessness, then, God’s omniscience is preserved, for he has exhaustive knowledge of all reality (i.e., all tenselessly true propositions). When he writes that, sans creation, ‘any future-tense propositions that exist must be uniformly false,’ Craig is relying on the distinction between propositions and truths: for in the absence of tensed time there is no future and thus no future-tensed truths. His point is that, whereas it is conceivable that there may be future-tense propositions, there simply cannot be any tensed truths sans creation. So, sans creation, the proposition Keith Loftin is now typing on his computer may exist, but it would have to be false (because, again, sans creation there is no such fact). At the moment of creation, however, the future-tensed proposition Keith Loftin will type on his computer suddenly becomes true (because with the creation of a tensed universe comes time). Craig’s claim that at creation ‘myriad future-tense propositions suddenly switch truth-values’ may initially seem fanciful, but this would be to fail to appreciate the staggering implications of the creation ex nihilo of a temporal universe.

\(^{50}\) Craig, ‘Response to Critics,’ in God & Time: Four Views, p. 186.
Though the peremptory objection fails, it does give rise to perplexing questions about God’s knowledge. If, as Craig suggests, there is a change in God’s knowledge at the moment of creation, does God change from being omniscient to semi-omniscient (or vice versa)? What metaphysical implications might such a change in knowledge entail? Does accidental temporalism involve an attenuated conception of omniscience? Such questions find expression in two objections which will occupy the remainder of this chapter.

In *God & Time: Four Views*, Paul Helm writes:

Apart from the intrinsic oddity of the view, does not the old problem of timeless and the knowledge of indexicals come back to haunt Bill…? Does God, existing in his A-series timeless moment of time before the creation, know what is future to him? If he does, then surely he is, contra Bill, in time. And if he does not, then he is not omniscient on Bill’s own understanding of what omniscience is.\(^{51}\)

As our solution of the peremptory objection revealed, Helm evinces serious misunderstanding of Craig’s explanation of God’s existence *sans* creation. There is no ‘before the creation’ for God, and in his timelessness God (since there is no time) has no future; *sans* creation, nothing is future to God. Moreover, in the absence of tensed reality, the truth conditions for temporal indexicals\(^ {52}\) (e.g., ‘yesterday,’ ‘now,’ ‘tomorrow’) fail to obtain. In other words, *sans* creation, claims expressed via temporal indexicals—*Caesar crossed the Rubicon yesterday*—are false. Yet failing to know a falsity hardly impugns God’s omniscience.

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\(^{51}\) Helm, ‘Response to William Lane Craig,’ p. 164.

\(^{52}\) An ‘indexical’ is an expression that switches meanings depending upon the context in which it is uttered. For example, the indexical ‘you’ refers to different people in different contexts (say, on different days or in different locations). The same goes for the indexical ‘that’. On one utterance I mean to refer to a particular pen on my desk (*that pen*), whereas on another utterance Gerald means to refer to a particular building on campus (*the library is that building*). A temporal indexical, then, picks out a particular time (*we’re meeting *today*) but the meaning of ‘today’ is dependent upon the context in which it is uttered.
Helm does, however, touch on an intriguing question: does God, sans creation, have complete knowledge of what occurs once he does create? In the second edition of his *Eternal God*, Helm offers a more sophisticated version of his objection based on divine omniscience:

[I]n becoming temporal God’s knowledge will switch from knowing truths tenselessly to knowing tensed truths: God in time literally foreknows whereas a timeless God does not, and so on. Further, if the first act is timelessly eternal...then in that act God does not know what will happen, or what is presently happening.⁵³

Helm clearly has in mind Craig’s claim that at creation ‘myriad future-tense propositions suddenly switch truth-values,’ which entails an omniscient God’s becoming temporal. Certainly Craig would agree that a timeless God does not literally foreknow, but it is difficult to see why accidental temporalism would demand that at creation God is absentminded regarding what happens or what is presently happening. The switch in God’s knowledge at creation, after all, is not from knowing truths tenselessly to knowing tensed truths, but rather from knowing only tenseless truths to knowing both tenseless as well as tensed truths. Helm’s claim that accidental temporalism renders God absentminded at creation is simply a *non sequitur*.

### 4.4.1 A Potential Dilemma

Nevertheless, if being omniscient means that God knows every true statement and does not believe any untrue statements, then it may appear that a crucial support of the tensed theory of time is undermined.⁵⁴ To develop this objection I shall suggest an original argument to the effect that accidental temporalists are forced to choose between

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⁵⁴ Thanks to Greg Ganssle for helpful discussion of this argument.
omniscience and the A-theory of time. Let us assume that God has created a temporal universe. Let us further assume that *a bell is now ringing* (and that now is $t_2$), so we have an event of *a bell ringing at $t_2$*. So, employing McTaggart’s language of A-properties—that is, tensed properties such as *being past*, *being present*, and *being future*—we observe that the particular event of the bell ringing is happening and so has the A-property of *happening now*. This event also has the B-property (McTaggart’s term for the tenseless relations of *being earlier than*, *being simultaneous with*, and *being later than*) *happens at $t_2$*.

Let us further assume that, *sans* creation, God either knows this event or he does not. Even if one maintains that *sans* creation God, being omniscient, must know the tenseless fact *a bell rings at $t_2$*, it must be acknowledged that God could not, *sans* creation, know the tensed fact *a bell is now ringing*. This is because *sans* creation there is no such fact *a bell is now ringing* (which is to say that *sans* creation there are no A-properties).

Let us further suppose that a moment earlier, at $t_1$, Quasimodo pulls the bell’s cord. It appears, then, that *sans* creation God must know at least two things:

12) Quasimodo pulls the cord at $t_1$, and

13) a bell rings at $t_2$.

If this is so, then it seems to follow that God must also know that $t_1$ is before $t_2$ (that is, God must also know that $t_1$ has the tenseless property of being *earlier than* $t_2$). In other words it seems that each of these truths, being tenseless truths, can be known timelessly; none of these truths becomes true at the moment of creation. This seems to imply that B-
properties exist *sans* creation, though the events themselves do not exist.\(^{55}\) If this is so, however, it appears that B-properties are more fundamental than A-properties, for apparently the B-properties exist (or, perhaps more accurately, statements ascribing B-properties to events are true) and the A-properties do not exist (or statements ascribing A-properties are not true) *sans* creation. Yet the claim that A-properties are more fundamental than B-properties is central to the tensed theory of time.

McTaggart argued and contemporary advocates of the tensed theory of time agree that B-properties depend upon A-properties (that is, that time considered as a B-series depends upon time considered as an A-series). To see why, recall the claim that time presupposes change. Things or events are only properly temporal if they undergo change. Considered as a B-series, however, events do not change; times and events do not change in their B-properties. They all exist on an ontological par and therefore have a fixed B-series position. Consider McTaggart’s oft-cited illustration:

> Take any event—the death of Queen Anne…That it is a death, that it is the death of Anne Stuart, that is has such causes, that is has such effects—every characteristic of this sort never changes. ‘Before the stars saw one another plain,’ the event in question was the death of a Queen. At the last moment of time…it will still be the death of a Queen.\(^{56}\)

In short, events cannot change in respect to their B-properties.

> Taken as an A-series, on the other hand, things and events constantly change in respect to their A-properties. The Queen’s death, for example, changed from being in the distant future, drew steadily nearer, was once present, then receded into the past, then into

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\(^{55}\) This is demanded by accidental temporalism, which rests upon the dynamic theory of time. A proponent of static time would instead hold that these events—like *all* events—co-exist eternally within static time.

the distant past. Indeed, according to McTaggart, ‘if we remove the \(A\)-series from the \textit{prima facie} nature of time, we are left with a series which is not temporal, and which allows change no more than the series of latitudes does.’\(^57\) In the absence of any way for the \(B\)-series alone to account for change, the \(B\)-series is not temporal. Thus, the most fundamental \textit{temporal} properties must be the \(A\)-properties.

We are now in a position to state the difficulty with precision:

\begin{enumerate}
\item If accidental temporalism is true, then God is omniscient and the tensed theory of time is true.
\item In order for the tensed theory of time to be true, \(A\)-properties must be more fundamental than \(B\)-properties.
\item If accidental temporalism is true, then, \textit{sans} creation, God’s knowledge consists entirely of tenseless truths (and their accompanying \(B\)-properties).
\item If, \textit{sans} creation, God’s knowledge consists entirely of tenseless truths (and their accompanying \(B\)-properties), then either (i) there are, \textit{sans} creation, no tensed truths, or (ii) God is not omniscient.
\item If (i), then it is not the case that \(A\)-properties are more fundamental than \(B\)-properties.
\item Therefore, if accidental temporalism is true, then either \(A\)-properties are not more fundamental than \(B\)-properties, or God is not omniscient.
\end{enumerate}

This argument has impressive merits. Though divine omniscience is not essential to accidental temporalism, accidental temporalists such as Craig are loath to deny it. The fundamentality of \(A\)-properties, being central to the tensed theory of time, is essential to accidental temporalism. So, if sound this would be a fatal dilemma for accidental temporalism.

\(^{57}\) \textit{The Nature of Existence}, 2:15.
What can be said in response to this argument? Both premises (14) and (15) are non-controversial, being true by definition. (16) seems unassailable, for *sans* creation there is no tensed reality of which God could have knowledge. The points of contention, then, are the sub-conclusions (17) and (18). As for (17), if the antecedent is true, then either there are no tensed truths to know—which just is (i)—or there are tensed truths but God does not know them—which just is (ii). In the absence of any redefinition of omniscience, (ii) is clearly undesirable for the accidental temporalist. Since (19) follows inescapably from (14) through (18), the accidental temporalist who seeks to affirm both God’s omniscience and the tensed theory of time must reject premise (18).

Is it possible, *sans* creation, for A-properties to be more fundamental than B-properties? Clearly, *sans* creation, there are B-properties and not A-properties. Recall that *sans* creation there is no temporal reality whatsoever (and therefore no A-properties); temporal properties come into existence at creation. In that case it is fairly obvious that A-properties cannot be, *sans* creation, more fundamental than anything.

To assume, however, that this renders B-properties more fundamental than A-properties would be to misunderstand the argument thus far. If it amounts to a notion of fundamentality at all, the mere presence of B-properties in the absence of A-properties is a decidedly pared down notion of fundamentality. The point, rather, is that A-properties

58 It is difficult to imagine any suitable redefinition of omniscience, for in order to overturn (18) such a redefinition would have to allow for the existence of tensed truths of which God is ignorant. It may be suggested that perhaps an omniscient God knows all *facts*, where ‘facts’ are understood as chunks of world-objects including their properties, relations, etc., and are more fundamental than truths. If so, an omniscient God could know all *facts* without reference to tensed truths. Brian Leftow has proposed a view similar to this, which he calls ‘factual omniscience’ (*Time and Eternity*, pp. 334f). This definition is insufficient for present purposes, however, because it implies there are no tensed truths (for, as we saw in chapter two, Leftow’s view entails static time). For development of this criticism, see William Lane Craig, ‘Omniscience, Tensed Facts, and Divine Eternity,’ *Faith and Philosophy* 17 [2000]: 225-241). In short, no adequate definition of omniscience can allow for this.
are more fundamental than B-properties *to time*. Recall (from the discussion in chapter three) that a series of B-properties *is* a series, but it is not a *temporal* series. Taken independently, a series of B-properties is akin to the series of longitudinal lines: it is an ordinal, but nevertheless time-less, series. Thus in order for this series to become temporal, its members must be imbued with A-properties. Of course on the accidental temporalist view, *sans* creation, this cannot happen because there are no A-properties. Therefore, even though there are B-properties, there can be, *sans* creation, no temporal series.

Even though, *sans* creation, A-properties cannot be more fundamental than B-properties (since the former don’t exist), neither can B-properties be more fundamental to time than A-properties. Nor should we expect them to be, given the absence of any temporal reality. Therefore, the dynamic theorist’s claim that ‘A-properties are more fundamental than B-properties’ still holds, because what this really means is that ‘A-properties are more fundamental than B-properties *to time*.’ But that means McTaggart’s claim can have nothing to do with any state of affairs *sans* creation. The upshot of all this is that the consequent of premise (18) is false: A-properties remain more fundamental to time than do B-properties. Moreover, since there are, *sans* creation, no A-properties (and so no tensed truths), there are no truths of which God is ignorant. In that case, His omniscience is perfectly preserved, and this argument against accidental temporalism is rendered unsound.

### 4.4.2 A Grounding Worry

If the foregoing discussion is correct, then both the tensed theory of time and divine omniscience are safeguarded on accidental temporalism. Upon further reflection,
though, my argument suggests a further original difficulty concerning God’s omniscience *sans* creation. Accidental temporalists want to claim that God’s knowledge, *sans* creation, is tenseless. It appears that this claim must mean either (a) ‘*sans* creation, God’s knowledge does not include or depend upon any A-properties’ or (b) ‘*sans* creation, God’s knowledge does not include or depend upon any A-properties and does include all propositions involving B-properties.’ These options appear to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The previous section’s argument assumed reading (b), which attributes to God *sans* creation (putative) knowledge of propositions such as *The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944*.

According to a good many contemporary metaphysicians, in order for a proposition to have truth value it must have some grounding in reality. In other words, in order to have truth value, there must be some fact-of-the-matter—that is, some state of affairs, something in reality—that makes true or grounds that proposition. 59 If this is so one encounters an obvious difficulty: what exactly is it that God has knowledge of, *sans* creation, when He knows *The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944*? After all, *sans* creation there is not and indeed *cannot* be any such grounds for propositions of the sort *The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944*. *Sans* creation there are no Allies, no Normandy, and no 6 June 1944; *sans* creation God alone exists. Therefore, such propositions lack truth value and thus cannot be known by God. 60 The force of this

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59 This view of grounding assumes a certain view of the relation between truth and reality known as *truth-maker* theory, the gist of which is that for every true proposition *x* there is some *truth-maker* that brings about or makes *x* true. For more on truth-maker theory, see Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, ‘Truth–Makers,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44 (1984): 287–321 and Anna-Sofia Maurin, *If Tropes* (Synthese Library 308, Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer, 2002), pp. 37-60.

60 Interestingly, pure atemporal views of God’s relation to time—e.g., the views of Paul Helm and Brian Leftow—are immune to such grounding worries for the very reason they were previously found inadequate (it was argued such a claim runs afoul of the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*). According to
objection, then, is that accidental temporalism appears to rob God of His knowledge *sans* creation of such tenseless propositions, thus diminishing His omniscience.

It seems to me, however, that the objection is multiply flawed. Recall the traditional definition of omniscience:

(O) For any agent \( x \), \( x \) is omniscient = def For every statement \( s \), if \( s \) is true, then \( x \) knows that \( s \) and does not believe not-\( s \).

In order to preserve robust omniscience, we need only clarify the notion of God’s tenseless knowledge, *sans* creation. If one insists on (b), the grounding objection prevents the accidental temporalist from affirming omniscience. But why not jettison (b) and adopt the understanding of tenseless knowledge found in (a)?

The difference is apparent: (a) does not commit one to the existence of B-properties *sans* creation. In other words, by adopting (a) one grants the objector’s claim that there is no grounding, *sans* creation, for propositions of the sort *The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944*. Since (a) also denies the existence of A-properties *sans* creation, this move amounts to claiming that, *sans* creation, God’s knowledge neither includes nor depends upon A- or B-properties. That is to say, *sans* creation, God knows neither tensed nor tenseless propositions because there exist no grounds for any such propositions. Of course the argument does not rule out God’s knowledge, *sans* creation, of all necessary propositions (e.g., mathematical truths, self-knowledge); only contingent tenseless truths are ruled out.

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atemporalists, no such state of affairs *God existing alone sans creation* obtains in the actual world. Instead, though it is ontologically dependent upon God, the space-time universe itself exists eternally. Of course, if the space-time universe is eternal, then propositions of the sort *The Allies land on Normandy 6 June 1944* eternally have grounding.
If the argument thus far is cogent, then adopting (a) does not undermine omniscience, for the statement *The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944* is not true *sans* creation. In fact, *sans* creation, the statement is neither true nor false: there is no corresponding reality to grant it truth value. But then, if the statement is not true, then God’s not knowing it hardly impugns His omniscience. Now, it may be objected that by the same token the counterfactual *If God actualizes W₁, then the Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944* is likewise not true, which appears to rule out the possibility of divine middle knowledge *sans* creation. However, this problem would only arise if the proposition’s antecedent were tensed. This is because divine middle knowledge is counterfactually dependent upon *tensed* truths; otherwise we’d be discussing divine natural knowledge (more on this below). But the objector’s antecedent is tenseless, thus posing no threat to the proposed counterfactual knowledge. This is all that is needed for accidental temporalism to assuage the grounding worry. If such a solution seems radical, it is only because it fully appreciates the truly radical nature of a creation *ex nihilo*.

So accidental temporalism neatly avoids the grounding worry, but such a solution naturally raises the question, ‘what is the content of God’s knowledge, *sans* creation?’ This question as such has never been addressed in the professional literature. Has our solution rendered vacuous God’s omniscience *sans* creation? It must be reiterated that if, *sans* creation, there literally are no truths which involve either A- or B-properties, then not even an omniscient God can know them. So, *sans* creation, God does not know propositions of the sort *The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944* or *The Allies will land in Normandy on 6 June 1944*. (As has been concluded, though, this does not rule out God’s knowing, *sans* creation, all necessary truths.) One implication of this seems to be
that, *sans* creation, God does not possess *fore*knowledge. Such knowledge rests upon A-properties. For example, *God foreknows that the Allies will invade Normandy on 6 June 1944* amounts to *God knows now that the Allies will invade Normandy on 6 June 1944, which is as yet future*. Notice that omniscience forbids God from believing any non-true statements. So, *sans* creation, what does an omniscient God know?\(^{61}\)

The accidental temporalist is presented with two options for elucidating God’s knowledge *sans* creation: the ‘open theism’ view and the ‘middle knowledge’ view. Proponents of both options make clear their intention to preserve divine omniscience, along with their affirmation of the A-theory of time. By my lights both accounts of God’s knowledge are consistent with accidental temporalism.\(^{62}\)

In recent decades the ‘open theism’ view has been increasingly embraced by philosophical theologians, especially since the 1994 publication of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*.\(^{63}\) The central claim of the open view is that God, though omniscient, does not and indeed, *cannot* possess infallible foreknowledge of future contingents. This is motivated principally by the belief (A) that the future does not (yet) exist (i.e., the A-theory), an inflexible belief (B) that humans are...

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\(^{61}\) A full consideration of the divine ideas is, of course, far beyond the scope of this thesis. My purpose here is merely to suggest an account of God’s knowledge that is consonant with accidental temporalism and that is such that, *sans* creation, robust omniscience is preserved—not to fully explicate and defend an account of the divine ideas. Definitive treatments include William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2988), William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), Tamar Rudavsky, *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy* (The Netherlands: Reidel, 1985), and Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955).

\(^{62}\) As Alan Rhoda, a prominent open theist, observes: ‘it is not immediately clear why open theists could not adopt Craig’s suggestion that God is atemporal *sans* creation and temporal since creation’ (‘Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof,’ *Religious Studies* 44 [2008]: 228). To my knowledge, however, the compatibility of open theism and accidental temporalism has never been defended in print.

free in the libertarian sense, and a conviction (C) that Scripture portrays the future as at
least partially open to God.64 Together (A) and (B), open theists maintain, imply (D) that
God cannot perfectly foreknow how libertarianly free creatures will choose to act. Open
theists are therefore committed to the belief that the traditional conception of omniscience
discussed above is incompatible with libertarian freedom. For example, Gregory Boyd
explains, ‘If you think about the matter deeply, the classical view [of omniscience] raises
a number of thorny questions. For example, if every choice you’ve ever made was certain
an eternity before you made it, were you really free when you made each choice?’65 Their
argument is that if God infallibly believed at some past time \( t_1 \) that (some future
contingent event) \( P \), then given that no one can now alter the fact that God infallibly
believed \( P \) at \( t_1 \), it follows that \( P \) is true. But if this is so, it follows that no one can now
alter the fact that \( P \) is true, and if no one can now alter the fact that \( P \) is true, then \( P \) is not
really contingent at all.66 According to open theists, however, though He does not have
infallible knowledge of the future, God is nevertheless omniscient. As Clark Pinnock
explains:

64 The ‘libertarian’ understanding of free will holds that ‘the ultimate cause of a free action is not some set
of prior conditions, but the agent herself who performs the action’ (Thomas Flint, Divine Providence
[Ithaca, NT: Cornell University Pres, 1995], p. 32). Helpful discussion of the freewill debate may be found
the exegetical case for open theism in ‘The Open Theism View,’ in Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views,
eds. James Beilby and Paul Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001) and his God of the
Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000); Richard Rice,
‘Biblical Support for a New Perspective,’ in The Openness of God.

65 Gregory Boyd, God of the Possible (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 10. It should be noted that Boyd’s
use of the word ‘before’ suggests a belief that time (somehow) existed sans creation. Peter van Inwagen
urges an argument for Open Theism similar to Boyd’s in his ‘What Does an Omniscient Being Know
Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 216-230. See also Richard Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism

66 Linda Zagzebski offers a helpful discussion of this and related arguments in ‘Eternity and Fatalism,’ in
God, Eternity, and Time, eds. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (Burlington, VT: Ashgate
Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively foreknown. This is because the future is not determinate but shaped in part by human choices. The future is not fixed like the past, which can be known completely. The future does not yet exist and therefore cannot be infallibly anticipated, even by God. Future decisions cannot in every way be foreknown, because they have not yet been made. God knows everything that can be known—but God’s foreknowledge does not include the undecided.\(^\text{67}\)

As has been frequently discussed in the professional literature, the open view preserves God’s perfect, exhaustive knowledge of both the past and the present. He also knows intimately the tendencies and inward constitution of His creatures, as well as His own purposes.\(^\text{68}\) Moreover, as Richard Swinburne, another prominent open theist, notes, God does have beliefs regarding future contingents:

> In choosing to preserve his own freedom (and to give others freedom), he (that is, God) limits his own knowledge of what is to come. He continually limits himself in this way by not curtailing his or men’s future freedom. As regards men, their choices are much influenced by circumstances and this makes it possible for a being who knows all the circumstances to predict human behaviour correctly most of the time, but always with the possibility that men may falsify those predictions.\(^\text{69}\)

As Swinburne makes clear, though, some of God’s beliefs may well turn out to be false. In short, open theists are adamant that God is omniscient in virtue of perfectly knowing all of reality, which is to say He knows all that exists to be known; since the future does not exist to be known, God’s not perfectly knowing the future is said to be no slight to His omniscience. This, of course, has implications for God’s knowledge \textit{sans creation}.


On the open view, God—either sans creation or subsequent to creation—lacks infallible knowledge of future contingents because these propositions lack truth-value and are thus unknowable. If omniscience requires knowing all truths and there are truths about the future, then if follows that omniscience must include knowing such truths. The question, then, is whether future contingents do in fact lack truth-value. Open theists seem to believe this is so simply in virtue of the non-existence of the future (whereas the present and, arguably, the past do exist and are therefore infallibly knowable by God). Yet the accidental temporalist who is committed to traditional Christian orthodoxy is confronted with compelling reasons to reject the open theism option. As Bruce Ware has observed, ‘Open theism collapses as a comprehensive model…if it can be demonstrated that God does in fact know all of the future, including all future contingencies and all future free choices…’\(^70\) The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that God does in fact have such knowledge. One reads in Isaiah, for example, that ‘I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose”’ (Is. 46:9-10). Or again: ‘Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last…Who is like me? Let him proclaim it, let him declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I don’t know any”’ (Is. 44:6-8). Such exhaustive knowledge is echoed in the New Testament: ‘For He

was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times’ (1 Pet. 1:20). Beyond such general statements, the common biblical phenomena of prophecy demands knowledge of future contingents. Jesus, for example, correctly prophesied that Peter would deny his Lord three times (Luke 22:34, 54-62). Beyond this, the Old Testament test for a true prophet states in part: ‘whenever a prophet speaks in my name and the prediction is not fulfilled, then I have not spoken it’ (Deut. 18:22), an implication of which is that God must have knowledge of future contingents.\(^71\) Given the biblical portrayal of God, therefore, the accidental temporalist is compelled to reject the open theism option and look elsewhere for an acceptable account of God’s knowledge sans creation.

It appears that besides His knowledge of necessary truths, sans creation, all of God’s knowledge must be counterfactual (i.e., knowledge of what would be or might be the case, \textit{if something else were the case}—for example, if God were to create such and such a world). Such knowledge will include all \textit{possibilia}—that is, knowledge of all contingent compossible states of affairs that could obtain.

Through this type of knowledge He knew all the things to which the divine power extended either immediately or by the mediation of secondary causes, including not only the natures of individuals and the necessary states of affairs composed of them, but also the contingent states of affairs—through this knowledge He knew, to be sure, not that the latter were or were not going to obtain determinately, but rather that they were able to obtain and able not to obtain, a feature which belongs to them necessarily and thus also falls under God’s natural knowledge.\(^72\)

\(^71\) This is argued by Francis Beckwith, ‘Limited Omniscience and the Test for a Prophet: A Brief Philosophical Analysis,’ \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 36 (1993): 357-362.

This knowledge was generally known among the Medieval divines as God’s *natural knowledge* because God possesses it simply in virtue of being God. Via His natural knowledge God knows, for example, that possibly the Allies invade Normandy on 6 June 1944 and possibly the Allies refrain from invading Normandy on 6 June 1944. In the language of contemporary metaphysicians, God’s natural knowledge affords Him knowledge of all possible worlds (viz., all *necessary* knowledge, that is, truths that do not depend upon the divine will but are true simply in virtue of God’s nature).

While it is essential for omniscience, if *sans* creation the extent of God’s knowledge were natural knowledge, then arguably God would be ignorant of what states of affairs *would* obtain were He to actualize a particular possible world. In other words, given only natural knowledge, God knows exhaustively what states of affairs *could* obtain were He to create a given possible world, but He remains ignorant of what states of affairs *would* obtain in that world. God’s knowledge, *sans* creation, of all contingently *true* counterfactuals is known as His *middle knowledge*. It is God’s middle knowledge that

in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each free will, He saw in His own essence what each such will would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or that or indeed in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite…

So, whereas via His natural knowledge God knows there is a possible world He could create in which the Allies *could* invade Normandy on 6 June 1944, via his middle knowledge God knows whether the Allies *would* invade Normandy on 6 June 1944 if He

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73 *Molina on Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV,* 4.52.9. Since the first translation into English of part four of Molina’s *Concordia* by Alfred Freddoso in 1988, a tremendous literature has arisen on the tenability of Molina’s doctrine of middle knowledge.
placed them under the circumstances of that possible world. Or again, via His natural knowledge God knows that, if prompted by Gerald Bray, Keith Loftin could write about divine ideas on 5 May 2011 (and also the corollary: that if prompted by Gerald Bray, Keith Loftin could not write about divine ideas on 5 May 2011). Each of these counterfactuals belongs to a different possible world it is within God’s power to create. Via His middle knowledge, however, God knows what Keith Loftin would do if prompted by Gerald Bray. The result is that God has knowledge of precisely which contingent states of affairs would obtain given any set of circumstances, such as creating a particular possible world. Interestingly, this seems to imply that any accidental temporalist who wishes to preserve robust omniscience sans creation must adopt this model of the divine ideas (or one very much like it). Otherwise, at the moment of creation God will be surprised to learn what states of affairs actually obtain, which is an undesirable implication for many, including Craig.

As with the grounding objection considered above, detractors of the middle knowledge proposal have objected that sans creation God cannot possess such counterfactual knowledge (for example, counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, that is, knowledge of what some libertarianly free creature would do in certain circumstances) for the simple reason that such counterfactuals have no truth value. This is because

74 An exhaustive consideration of middle knowledge is, of course, beyond the scope of the present work, but this model, referred to since the Middle Ages as Molinism, is ably explicated and defended by a number of contemporary philosophers. See, for example, Thomas Flint, Divine Providence: the Molinist Account (Ithaca: New York, Cornell University Press, 1998); Alvin Plantinga, ‘Which Worlds Could God Have Created?’ The Journal of Philosophy 70 (1973): 539-552; Richard Otte, ‘A Defense of Middle Knowledge,’ International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 21 (1987): 161-169; Eef Dekker, Middle Knowledge (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

there are no real or actual states of affairs in existence to ground such propositions, that is, no truth-makers. As William Hasker puts it, ‘In order for a (contingent) conditional state of affairs to obtain, its obtaining must be grounded in some categorical state of affairs. More colloquially, truths about “what would be the case...if” must be grounded in truths about what is in fact the case.’ 76 In other words, the objectors claim, there is no fact to the matter of what a libertarianly free creature would do in certain counterfactual circumstances, and so there is nothing there for God to know. If this is so, then God cannot have middle knowledge.

The objection seems initially to be a straightforward one. Closer inspection, however, suggests the notion that something must ‘ground’ propositions in this way has been bandied about too loosely. After all, as Alvin Plantinga has observed, the denial that any counterfactuals of freedom are true is counterintuitive: ‘It seems to me much clearer that some counterfactuals of freedom are at least possibly true than that the truth of propositions must, in general, be grounded in this way.’ 77 For example, it seems that the counterfactual If Henry were to propose marriage, then Anne would (freely) accept has truth value: either it is true that Anne would freely accept, or it is false that Anne would freely accept. In either case, the counterfactual seems to possess truth value. Furthermore, what about non-counterfactual propositions involving freedom? Consider, for example,

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the proposition *Two weeks ago Gerald lectured on the Incarnation*. Since Gerald performed this action freely, what is it that grounds the truth of this proposition? If the response is that the fact of Gerald’s having delivered the lecture is the ground, then it seems a like response is readily available to ground counterfactuals: what grounds *If Henry were to propose marriage, then Anne would (freely) accept* is the fact that if Henry were to propose, then Anne would freely accept. Moreover, if the grounding objector insists that all propositions (including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom) must be metaphysically grounded by truth-makers that are either themselves concrete objects or imply the existence of concrete objects, then obvious difficulties arise.\(^78\) There are true negative existential propositions, for example, whose truth-makers could not possibly be an entity in virtue of which such propositions are true: *Keith did not have eggs for breakfast* or *Baal does not exist* cannot be so grounded, because the alleged truth-makers cannot exist (viz., nothing concrete exists to make it true that *Keith did not have eggs for breakfast*).\(^79\) These considerations seem to lend considerable *prima facie* support in favor of there being true counterfactuals which God could know.\(^80\)

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\(^79\) It may be asked whether the proposition *Keith did not have eggs for breakfast* merely *seems* problematic due simply to the negative expression employed—after all, Keith has a reasonable and well-functioning memory that could serve to ground the claim. Such a suggestion, however, fails for two reasons. First, this strategy would plainly fail for most negative existential propositions (e.g., *Cerberus does not exist; Keith has never visited Mars; There is not a hobbit beneath the bed*). Since Cerberus does not and never has existed, there can be no memories (or other epistemological state) of Cerberus. Second, the suggestion mistakenly conflates the epistemological and the metaphysical. According to the theory under consideration, when we enquire about the truth-maker for some proposition we are seeking *that in virtue of which* some proposition is true. However, *Keith did not have eggs for breakfast* is not true because Keith’s reliable memory dictates as much. Rather, one’s memory is correct in virtue of it’s agreeing with the antecedent *metaphysical* reality. Moreover, appealing to some positive existential proposition as the truth-maker for some negative existential proposition will not work. Remember: according to truth maker theory, something exists which necessarily implies the truth of the negative existential proposition *Cerberus does not exist*. For more on this see Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
Beyond this *prima facie* support, to what might the proponent of middle knowledge point to ground such counterfactuals? It might be suggested that we look no further than God’s beliefs: if God believes that *If Henry were to propose marriage, then Anne would (freely) accept*, then since God is omniscient it would seem to follow that that counterfactual is true. As has been pointed out, however, this is unsatisfactory for ‘surely God believes a counterfactual of freedom because it is true, not…the other way around.’\(^{81}\) If a counterfactual were true in virtue of God’s believing it, human freedom would be severely threatened.

In fact, most proponents of middle knowledge undercut the objection by denying that counterfactuals (including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom) must be grounded by some truth-maker.\(^{82}\) Alfred Freddoso has argued to this effect by drawing a parallel between the grounding objection to counterfactuals and the similar rejection of what he

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\(^{80}\) Similar support is found in Scripture. 1 Samuel 23:6-13, for example, indicates that God knew that if David were to remain in the city of Keilah, then Saul would attack and capture David. This knowledge is counterfactual because, in fact, David fled Keilah to safety. Or again the apostle Paul, ‘in reflecting upon God’s eternal salvific plan realized in Christ, asserts, “None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory” (1 Cor. 2.8). By “the rulers of this age” Paul means either the Jewish and Roman authorities such as Herod and Pilate who were the historical agents who instigated or carried out the crucifixion (cf. Acts 4. 27–28) or, more plausibly, the spiritual principalities and powers who rule “this present evil age” (Gal. 1. 4; cf. 1 Cor. 2. 6). In either case, we have here a counterfactual about creaturely free actions. So is Paul’s assertion true or not? Will we have the temerity to say that Paul was wrong? Since the Church believes that Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these words, she accepts them as revealed truth from God’ (Craig, ‘Middle Knowledge, Truth Makers, and the “Grounding Objection.”’ 339).

\(^{81}\) Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology*, p. 150.

\(^{82}\) However, some proponents of middle knowledge, such as Trenton Merricks, have agreed that propositions (including counterfactuals) do demand such metaphysical grounding but have rejected truth-maker theory. Merricks argues for an ontology that grounds counterfactuals in ‘the world’s subjunctive aspect’ (see his *Truth and Ontology*, pp. 147-169, and his ‘Truth and Molinism,’ in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Ken Perszyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
calls ‘absolute future contingents,’ that is, ‘contingent truths about the absolute future.’

Consider, for example, the absolute future contingent *Gerald will (freely) deliver the plenary lecture at (some future) time* t. The grounding objector will point out that there are as yet no metaphysical grounds for affirming the truth of this proposition. Nothing about what Gerald does here and now, and nothing about his character, entails or determines that he will freely deliver the plenary lecture at t. Indeed, even if when t arrives Gerald does in fact deliver the plenary lecture at t, the fact remains that there are at present no grounds for the proposition *Gerald will (freely) deliver the plenary lecture at (some future) time* t, and so it is therefore false. So, as Freddoso explains, ‘there are not and cannot be adequate metaphysical grounds at present for the truth of the absolute future contingent’ under consideration. So the grounding objector equally rejects both counterfactuals and absolute future contingents as ungrounded.

Freddoso endorses the parallel: if one rejects the truth of counterfactuals because they’re ungrounded, then one ought to also reject the truth of absolute future contingents for the same reason. Freddoso goes on, however, to suggest that we have good reason to affirm the truth of absolute future contingents. If, for example, today I assert that *Gerald will (freely) deliver the plenary lecture at (some future) time* t and in due course Gerald (freely) in fact delivers the plenary lecture at t, then one would be hard pressed thereafter to deny that my earlier assertion was true. It seems eminently reasonable, therefore, to affirm that my assertion was true when originally uttered (before t). But if such absolute future contingents can be true, just what constitutes their metaphysical grounding? This

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84 ‘Introduction,’ p. 70.
question applies not only to absolute future conditionals, but to past-tense contingent propositions that are true in the present, as well.85 Suppose that Gerald decided a year in advance to deliver the plenary lecture at \( t \). So we are considering the proposition \( \text{It is now true that Gerald decided a year in advance to deliver the plenary lecture at } t \). For this proposition to be true, the relevant metaphysical grounding, it seems, would need to obtain at the time of Gerald’s deciding (not, say, two years in advance or two months later). Thus ‘there are now adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a past-tense proposition…just in case there were at some past time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present-tense counterpart.’86 In other words, past-tense contingent propositions demand grounding in the past, not the present. By the same token, we can explain that absolute future contingents such as \( \text{Gerald will (freely) deliver the plenary lecture at (some future) time } t \) are now adequately metaphysically grounded if there will be at the specified future time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present-tense counterpart. In other words, absolute future contingents demand grounding in the future, not the present. So, we can truthfully assert that \( \text{Gerald will (freely) deliver the plenary lecture at (some future) time } t \) if in fact Gerald delivers the plenary lecture at \( t \).87

From these considerations Freddoso concludes, ‘in order for propositions about the past or the future to be true now, it is not required that any agent now be causing them to be

85 ‘Introduction,’ p. 72.
86 ‘Introduction,’ p. 72.
87 To clarify, when we finite knowers utter propositions of this sort, there are two questions: one metaphysical and one epistemological. We are here interested only in the former: for present purposes we need only establish that such assertions are themselves either true or false. It may be argued that while finite knowers can have more or less confidence in such utterances, only an infinite knower (such as God) can assume the ideal epistemological stance and have complete knowledge of all such metaphysical truths.
true [as the grounding objection claims]. Rather, it is sufficient that some agent has caused or will cause the corresponding present-tense propositions to be true.\footnote{Introduction,’ p. 72.}

This account of the grounding of the truth of past-tense contingent propositions and absolute future contingents can be generalized and applied to counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. So the counterfactual \textit{If Henry were to propose marriage, then Anne would (freely) accept} is now adequately grounded just in case there \textit{would} be adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of \textit{Anne freely accepts} if Henry were to propose marriage. In short, such counterfactuals are adequately metaphysically grounded just in case the consequent would be grounded were the conditions of the antecedent to obtain. By my lights this scheme makes sense of one’s intuition that when Claire asserts in 2010 the truth of \textit{If Henry were to propose marriage, then Anne would (freely) accept}, she can in 2011 brag at Henry and Anne’s wedding that her assertion in 2010 was in fact true. This scheme can also make sense of one’s intuition that Claire’s assertion that \textit{If Henry were to propose marriage, then Anne would (freely) accept} is true, even if Henry (lacking self-confidence) never in fact proposes marriage to Anne. And this is sufficient to undercut the objection that there must be some real or actual states of affairs—some truth-maker—in existence to ground such counterfactual propositions, which preserves the proposal that God can, \textit{sans} creation, have knowledge of precisely which contingent states of affairs would obtain given any set of circumstances (such as creating a particular possible world). Thus my claim that the accidental temporalist desiring to preserve a high view of divine omniscience \textit{sans} creation must adopt the middle knowledge model of divine ideas (or one very much like) is safeguarded.
4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has raised what I take to be the weightiest philosophical objections to accidental temporalism currently on offer. Detractors of accidental temporalism tend to peremptorily dismiss the view, objecting that Craig’s ‘timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation’ locution is straightforwardly incoherent because it places God’s timeless phase temporally before His temporal phase. This objection has taken two forms: the disturbed timelessness objection and the before-after incoherence objection. Such dismissal is premature, because as we have seen, there is in fact no incoherence in claiming God’s two phases are not related as earlier/later than; God’s timeless phase is not to be conceived of as temporally before His temporal phase.

Any view of God’s relation to time will be intimately bound up with the Christian doctrine of omniscience. While theories of omniscience abound (most of which do not concern us here, including the so-called ‘open view’), it was asked whether accidental temporalism can preserve the traditional understanding of omniscience, especially in light of Craig’s claim that at creation ‘myriad future-tense propositions suddenly switch truth-values.’ Given a proper understanding of A- and B-properties, even if B-properties do exist sans creation the fundamentality of A-properties to time is not undermined. This is because, sans creation, there simply is no temporal reality; B-properties alone cannot constitute a temporal reality. Thus God’s not knowing tensed truths sans creation is no threat to His omniscience.

A potentially more troubling objection, however, is the worry that sans creation God possesses ungrounded knowledge. Upon clarifying that the meaning of ‘tenseless’ does not commit one to the actual existence of B-properties sans creation, this worry can
be avoided. The claim is that God does not know, *sans* creation, tenseless truths of the sort *The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944*. There are, *sans* creation, no such truths to be known. In light of the radical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, then, it seems God’s knowledge *sans* creation must consist entirely of necessary truths and contingent knowledge.

This chapter has reached the conclusion that accidental temporalism stands up well to close philosophical scrutiny. Such inquiry has raised interesting philosophical issues and afforded a good deal of original clarification of the view. While it is certainly possible that further philosophical objections may eventually be raised against accidental temporalism, I believe it has been demonstrated that the view nevertheless possesses adequate resources to merit serious consideration.

One key attribute of any good philosophical or theological view is its explanatory power and the scope of its usefulness. Having argued in the previous three chapters for the plausibility of accidental temporalism as a model for understanding God’s relation to time, the only remaining task is to discover what intellectual capital it yields. This task I undertake in the fifth chapter.
Chapter 5:

Implications of Accidental Temporalism

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four examined two objections to the effect that accidental temporalism is an incoherent position on God’s relation to time. It was argued that neither the disturbed timelessness objection nor the before-after incoherence objection is convincing. Worries involving divine omniscience and the fundamentality of A-properties were also assuaged. If my response to these arguments are cogent, then no incoherence has been seen within accidental temporalism. It shall therefore be assumed that the accidental temporalist conception of God’s relation to time, as explicated and defended in chapters three and four, is plausible, and I shall proceed on that assumption.

It is well established that theories possessing greater explanatory power and scope are to be preferred.\(^1\) Granted that it is a plausible account of God’s relation to time, we may well ask what implications follow from accepting accidental temporalism. We have already seen that accidental temporalism can account for a robust view of divine omniscience, objective temporal becoming, the tensed nature of time, and God’s genuine relations with the world. In this chapter I shall consider three further applications and implications, demonstrating that accidental temporalism has value in defending the coherence of Christian theism as well as the capacity to elucidate central Christian tenets.

\(^1\) Though he has in mind primarily historical (and not philosophical or theological) theories, Christopher McCullagh’s remarks on these virtues are apt (C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], pp. 18ff). See also Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject* (Geoffrey Chapman: London, 1998), p. 157.
Theists generally agree that whatever we say of God and His nature must fit coherently together. I agree. Thus when the divine attributes are rejected as incoherent, theistic philosophers must sit up and take notice. Nicholas Everitt has leveled just such a charge at the doctrine of divine eternity. Everitt argues that both the atemporal and the (purely) temporal interpretations of divine eternity fail, as do any attempts to combine the two. By way of response I shall argue that Everitt’s arguments are multiply flawed. I shall advance the discussion by applying accidental temporalism as an account that neatly avoids each difficulty he raises, thus preserving the coherence of God’s attributes.

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is a central tenet of Christian theism. Precisely how that doctrine is best interpreted, however, is a matter of some disagreement. There are two logically coherent ways to conceive creation *ex nihilo*, one weak and one strong. After establishing a *prima facie* case that the strong conception ought to be preferred, I shall argue that neither the purely atemporal nor the purely temporal interpretations of divine eternity can accommodate the strong conception. Accidental temporalism, however, can be shown to do so easily, thereby bringing greater conceptual perspicuity to the doctrine.

It is generally agreed among Christian theologians that the Logos, the second Person of the Trinity, did not come into existence at the moment of Incarnation. Rather the personal pre-existence of the Logos, even if not explicitly spelled out in Scripture, seems strongly presupposed for an orthodox Christology. As with the doctrine of creation there are two logically coherent schemes for understanding this pre-existence, one weak and one strong. I shall argue once again that pure atemporality cannot rise above the
attenuated weak view. I shall propose that accidental temporalism, however, can accommodate the strong understanding, which is to be preferred.

The debate between complementarians and egalitarians over the question of whether the Son’s functional subordination within the economic Trinity reflects eternal truths within the immanent Trinity raises a number of important and interesting questions. One such question involves the compatibility of the complementarian and the egalitarian views with the different conceptions of divine eternality. To my knowledge this question has yet to be raised in the professional literature. I shall argue that, whereas the complementarian view is equally compatible with pure temporalism, pure atemporalism, and accidental temporalism, the egalitarian view is logically consistent only on the accidental temporalist conception of divine eternality (although accidental temporalists are in no sense committed to egalitarianism).

Though it has never been seriously considered in these contexts, I shall argue that accidental temporalism avoids difficulties that plague the purely atemporalist and purely temporalist positions. Moreover, by offering plausible solutions to such familiar difficulties, accidental temporalism can indeed count among its virtues greater explanatory power and scope.

5.2 Everitt’s Atheological Objection from Divine Eternity

Though discussions of God’s relation to time are usually ‘in house’ discussions among theists, they are not exclusively so. Atheist philosopher Nicholas Everitt’s work *The Non-Existence of God* is a thoroughgoing and influential attack on the intelligibility
of the traditional understanding of God.² According to Everitt ‘the defining attributes of
God are either individually self-contradictory…or cannot be coinstantiated’ so that ‘not
only does God not exist, he cannot exist.’³ While deserving of an equally thorough
rebuttal, I shall constrain my remarks here to Everitt’s treatment of divine eternity.

Everitt begins his remarks by identifying what he takes to be the only two
interpretations of God’s eternity: either ‘He is, like us, a temporal being…[or] God’s
eternity means that God is a timeless being.’⁴ In fact, Everitt argues, each of these
interpretations faces insuperable difficulties, so ‘it seems…that however the theist tries to
conceptualise the relations between God’s relation to time and to creation, there is no
consistent interpretation.’⁵ Therefore, Everitt claims, neither conceptualization of divine
eternity can preserve the traditional understanding of God.

Everitt’s overall objection takes the following basic shape:

(1) God’s eternity must be interpreted to mean either God is (i) purely
temporal or (ii) purely atemporal.

(2) Both (i) and (ii) are sufficiently problematic as to be rejected.

(3) Therefore, God’s eternity is sufficiently problematic as to be rejected.

Of course God, if He exists, must somehow be related to time; He must be in some sense
‘eternal.’ Thus, assuming that

(4) If one or more of God’s attributes are rejected, then God (at least as
traditionally conceived) does not exist,

² Nicholas Everitt, The Non-Existence of God (New York: Routledge, 2004). See also Nicholas Everitt,
³ The Non-Existence of God, p. 303.
⁵ Everitt, The Non-Existence of God, p. 279. Everitt’s discussion of these difficulties may be found in The
then Everitt’s argument suggests that

\[(5) \quad \text{Therefore, God (at least as traditionally conceived) does not exist.}\]

Since the conclusions in (3) and (5) follow logically from their premises, this argument is valid. At issue, then, is whether those premises are true. We may grant for the sake of argument that (4) is true. Let us consider Everitt’s support for (1) and (2), beginning with (2).

5.2.1 Evaluation of Everitt’s Argument

As was argued in previous chapters, there are indeed good reasons for accepting the truth of (2), though they are not all the reasons offered by Everitt. According to Everitt, (i) is the view that

[God] exists at every time there ever has been or ever will be. He is…a being for whom some times are past, some times are future, and for whom every time either was or is or will be the present….He has an infinite past existence and an infinite future existence.\(^7\)

By now it will be obvious that Everitt has conflated temporalism (in the sense of omnitemporality) and pure temporalism (that is, everlastingness). As we have seen, to hold that God is in time does not necessarily mean that God has an infinitely long past; there are various ways in which to be a temporalist. Nevertheless, let us label Everitt’s (i) as pure temporalism and overlook this conflation. Everitt rejects (i) for three reasons.

Since we will ultimately grant the truth of (2), a full consideration of each of Everitt’s

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\(^6\) Everitt does not express his objection explicitly in this manner, but I have laid out his objection in this logical format for the sake of clarity.

\(^7\) The Non-Existence of God, p. 269. One winces at the imprecise usage of ‘exists at every time there ever has been or ever will be’ (p. 269) and ‘there is no time at which he does not exist’ (p. 271). Since Everitt fails to specify whether he is using the verb ‘exist(s)’ tensed or tenselessly, his characterization of (i) is ambiguous. Since no temporalist will hold that God literally exists equally at every time, we will assume he intends a tensed usage.
reasons for rejecting (i) and (ii) is unnecessary. Establishing one sound objection to each will be sufficient.

Everitt first claims that (i) violates the findings of modern science. To support this he appeals to a Kalām style argument: our best cosmological model tells us the universe, including space and time, began to exist a finite time ago. If so, then ‘there has not been an infinite past time in which God could have existed.’ Interestingly, an argument nearly identical to the one Everitt has in view is also endorsed by Christian philosopher Steven Cowan, who expresses it more precisely as a *reductio ad absurdum*:

(6) God has always existed.

(7) If God has always existed, then, necessarily, God has traversed an actually infinite series of moments in order to reach the present moment.

(8) Necessarily, God has traversed an actually infinite series of moments in order to reach the present moment.

(9) Necessarily, nothing can traverse an actually infinite series of moments.

(10) Necessarily, God has not traversed an actually infinite series of moments in order to reach the present moment.

(11) God has not always existed.

Of course, if time began to exist a finite time ago (or, what amounts to the same thing, if it is not possible that God has existed through an infinite series of moments), then divine

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8 The Non-Existence of God, p. 271. For reasons not at all apparent, Everitt goes on to claim that ‘if [God] exists at all, and his existence is of the eternal temporal kind, then he began to exist’ a finite time ago. This seems to be an obvious non sequitur, for while the past finitude of time does seem to forbid (i), it would not entail that God began to exist a finite time ago.

9 Steven B. Cowan, ‘A Reductio Ad Absurdum of Divine Temporality,’ *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 372. My (6) corresponds to Cowan’s (1), and so on. Though Cowan is arguing the same point as Everitt, the latter rejects Cowan’s formulation of the argument on the basis of competing conceptions of infinity (Everitt, ‘Interpretations of God’s Eternity,’ *Religious Studies* 34 [1998]: 25-32). Either way, the objection succeeds. It will be recalled from chapter two that Paul Helm deploys a very similar line of reasoning in favor of the atemporal view of God (*Eternal God*, pp. 37-38).
eternity cannot be interpreted in the purely temporal sense. This is, indeed, a compelling reason to reject (i).

Turning his attention to the purely atemporal alternative, Everitt explains (ii) as the view that

God is not a temporal being at all. He exists, but he does not exist ‘in’ time. He has no past and he has no future; it is not true that as each day passes, God has existed for a longer and longer period of time. He does not age with the passage of time. No times are past, or present, or future to God.\(^{10}\)

Everitt is even less keen on the viability of (ii) as a viable interpretation of divine eternity. It is somewhat surprising that Everitt, in his zeal to show the incompatibility of the divine attributes, neglects the argument from divine knowledge of tensed facts.\(^ {11}\) Regardless, he does muster a handful of objections to (ii), including several which would be easily refuted by adopting the tenseless theory of time, though this possibility is never considered.\(^ {12}\) Let us lay those aside, though, and focus instead on Everitt’s most promising objection: (ii) ‘denies that God precedes or is simultaneous with anything, and hence makes is impossible for God to stand in any causal relations with the universe. This will exclude him not just from being a creator, but also from performing miracles, and from appearing in religious experience.’\(^ {13}\) Given Christianity’s affirmation that God does

\(^{10}\) *The Non-Existence of God*, p. 274.

\(^{11}\) Recall the discussion in chapter three, where it was argued that an atemporal God cannot have knowledge of tensed facts about the universe.

\(^{12}\) For example, Everitt asks us to accept that the universe began a finite time ago. What, he asks, might God timelessly will in order to bring this about? ‘Clearly his willing cannot be expressed as “Let a universe with such-and-such a character exist now,” willed 15 billion years ago, since for a timeless being there is no ‘now’ at which he could have willed anything’ (Ibid., p. 278). This objection clearly presupposes the notion of an ontologically privileged now, which demands a tensed theory of time.

\(^{13}\) *The Non-Existence of God*, p. 276.
stand in causal (as well as conservational) relations with the universe, (ii) poses a significant threat to the Christian conception of God.

5.2.2 Refutation of Everitt’s Argument

This objection has two parts. First, Everitt claims that (ii) precludes God from standing in any causal relations whatsoever with the universe. Everitt evidently regards this claim self-evident, as he offers no support for it. It is again open to the atemporalist to invoke the tenseless theory of time: there is no logical incoherence in holding that God tenselessly brings the entire space-time block into existence at once. In such a case God would not exist within the space-time manifold, though He could very well stand in a causal relation to it. In the absence of any reason to insist that an atemporal being cannot stand in any causal relations, the first part of Everitt’s objection may be rejected.

Of course, the accidental temporalist cannot invoke the tenseless theory of time to solve this difficulty. What then? As we have seen, accidental temporalism is best construed as involving a relational understanding of time. Recall that according to this understanding, God’s acting is explanatorily prior to the existence of time (in other words, God’s creative act constitutes the first act and thus causally precedes time). The first moment of time logically presupposes God’s causing a first event, not vice versa. Thus God needn’t be in (pre-existent) time in order to stand in a causal relationship with time. On its face this alternative is eminently plausible. Pace Everitt, the claim that God’s creative act is simultaneous with the first event is perfectly congenial to the accidental temporalist.

Let us turn, then, to the second part of Everitt’s objection: the claim that (ii) precludes God from acting within time. It was previously argued (in chapter three) that,
given the objectively tensed nature of reality (viz., the truth of the A-theory of time), if God acts within time, then God cannot be atemporal. It is generally agreed among theists that God acts within time, hence God cannot be atemporal. Despite Everitt’s spurious claims regarding causation, his rejection of (ii) stands. Premise (2) of his argument is therefore true: both the purely temporal and the purely atemporal interpretations of divine eternity are sufficiently problematic to be rejected.

If Everitt’s premise (1) is true, then the argument before us constitutes a sound and potent challenge to the traditional conception of God. What is needed to preserve the coherence of that traditional conception is an interpretation of divine eternity other than (i) and (ii). It seems that only a schema such as accidental temporalism can circumvent this objection. Yet Everitt anticipates such a move and argues that attempts to combine (i) and (ii) cannot succeed. He writes:

Suppose…that God had a timeless existence until he created the temporal universe, but that once he has created the temporal universe, and for as long as he keeps it in existence, his own existence is temporal.\(^\text{14}\)

Whether Everitt has William Lane Craig specifically in mind is unclear, but is difficult to doubt that he has accidental temporalism in mind. Regardless, this suggestion contains elements of caricature. As Everitt notes, this attempt is plainly self-contradictory. In fact, it falls prey to the same rebuttal I deployed in response to the before-after incoherence objection considered in chapter four. Claiming that God exists timelessly ‘until’ creation implies the existence of time before the beginning of the temporal universe, which as we have seen is problematic. We can further agree with Everitt that if God presently (tensed) exists temporally, then that existence does not come after His timeless existence, and

\(^{14}\) The Non-Existence of God, p. 281.
God’s existence cannot be simultaneously timeless and temporal. Yet we have compelling reasons to deny Everitt’s claim that ‘there is no possibility of a being switching from a timeless to a temporal mode of existence.’ We have seen that this is precisely what accidental temporalism offers: a coherent model of God’s changing temporal modes from existing timelessly sans creation, to existing temporally subsequent to creation. Therefore, given a viable third interpretation of divine eternity, Everitt’s premise (1) is false and his objection is rendered unsound.

5.3 Divine Eternity and Creation Ex Nihilo

Though it is not developed in the classical creeds, the doctrine of creation ex nihilo is nevertheless central to traditional Christian theism. In fact, I would suggest that it is more central to Christian theism than is any particular conception of divine eternity. Precisely how creation is to be conceived, however, has been for centuries the subject of disagreement. Interpretations of the divine act of creation can be separated into two groups, one weak and one strong. To borrow two widely used terms, I shall refer to the former as the ontological dependence view and to the latter as the temporal origination view. It is not uncommon for proponents of each interpretation to affix the label of ‘creation ex nihilo’ to their view. The ontological dependence view stipulates that all things are ontologically dependent upon God, though it stops short of positing an absolute, temporal beginning to the universe’s existence. Classical proponents of this interpretation understood creation to involve God’s acting upon an amorphous substrate: creation ex materia. According to the ontological dependence view, even if some creature exists eternally, it is created ex nihilo just in case it depends upon God for its existence. The temporal origination view, on the other hand, understands creation in far more
radical ontological terms. While agreeing that all things stand in ontological dependence upon God, temporal origination further insists that creation ex nihilo is God’s literally bringing the universe into existence out of nothing whatsoever. Thus the past finitude of the universe is demanded.

Both the ontological dependence view and the temporal origination view, it seems to me, are logically coherent; neither involves logical contradictions. It must also be noted that both camps agree that, in some sense, God is the ‘Creator’ or ‘Maker’ of all things. After stating the prima facie case for the temporal origination view of creation, I shall argue that, while accidental temporalism comfortably accommodates temporal origination, such an interpretation is difficult at best to square with either the purely atemporal or purely temporal views of divine eternity.

5.3.1 Desiderata of Creation Ex Nihilo

Genesis begins with the pronouncement that ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1.1). That creation is a divine act is made clear. Less clear, perhaps, is whether or not the Hebrew text conveys an absolute beginning. In Isaiah, the LORD proclaims, ‘I am the LORD, who made everything, who alone stretched out the sky, who fashioned the earth all by myself’ (Is. 44.24). Less than a chapter later one reads that the LORD ‘is the true God, the one who formed the earth and made it; he established it, he did not create it without order, he formed it to be inhabited’ (Is. 45.18). While these texts may not demand a preexistent substratum, they do suggest the sui generis nature of God’s creation. The Psalmist similarly declares, ‘Let the whole earth fear the LORD! Let all who

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15 The original Hebrew text does not affix the definite article ‘the’ to ‘beginning,’ leading a number of scholars to render the verse ‘In the beginning, when God created…’ For discussion of the various interpretive options for Genesis 1:1, see Gordon Wenham’s *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. 11.
live in the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came into existence, he issued the decree, and it stood firm’ (Ps. 33.8-9; cf. 89.11-12). In the intertestamental book 2 Maccabees, a mother appeals to her son to ‘look at the sky and the earth; see all that is in them and realize that God made them out of nothing, and that man comes into being in the same way’ (2 Macc. 7.28). The Shepherd of Hermas tellingly commands belief that God brought all things ‘into existence out of non-existence’ (V.1.6). Apparently hearkening back to the opening of Genesis, the Gospel of John records that ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being’ (Jn. 1.1-3). On its face this text appears to draw a grand distinction between God and all other existing things, insisting that the existence of ‘all things’ originated as a result of God’s creative act.16 In several places the Apostle Paul seems to express the same idea. He writes, ‘for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we live, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we live’ (1 Cor. 8.6). ‘For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him’ (Col. 1.16). Paul summarily claims that ‘from Him and through Him and to Him are all things’ (Rom. 11.36). Finally, the author of Hebrews asserts that ‘by faith we understand that the worlds

16 ‘Even Rudolf Bultmann, for all his talk about Hellenistic influences on NT writers, declares that John 1:3 indicates that “everything that there is [panta]” is an affirmation in the strongest words possible that “everything without exception” has been made by the Logos: the creation is not the arrangement of a chaotic stuff, but is…creatio ex nihilo’ (The Gospel of John: A Commentary, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, et al. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], p. 38, cited in Copan, ‘Creation ex Nihilo or ex Materia? A Critique of the Mormon Doctrine of Creation,’ The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 9 (2005).
were prepared by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible’ (Heb. 11.3).

By my lights the preponderance of scriptural evidence bespeaks creation *ex nihilo* in the sense of temporal origination. It seems to me exceedingly difficult to reconcile texts such as John 1.3 with either the notion of a precreation substratum or the notion of an eternal creation. Doing so would seem to render something akin to ‘All things *except the substratum* came into being…’ which does not seem to capture the text’s intent. It must be acknowledged, though, that scholars disagree. Gerhard May, for example, claims that a specific doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is ‘not demanded by the text of the Bible.’ Regardless, whether or not such texts, either individually or cumulatively, demand one or the other interpretation of creation *ex nihilo* I shall leave to others to decide. It is not my purpose to settle the exegetical debate. I simply note that scholars disagree.

Whether or not May is correct, it will be instructive to consider a few historically influential understandings. The Nicene Creed affirms that God is the ‘maker of all things seen and unseen.’ The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) expands on Nicaea, declaring belief in the ‘only one true God…the Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and

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17 It is beyond our present purpose to develop fully the import of modern cosmology for the doctrine of creation, but our discussion of the *kalam* cosmological argument in chapter three has some bearing on the suggestion that the created order may be co-eternal with God. That argument, recall, implies the past collection of temporal events cannot be actually infinite—that time, therefore, must have had a beginning—which seems exceedingly difficult to reconcile with a created order co-eternal with God. This line of thought is developed by William Lane Craig in ‘Philosophic and Scientific Pointers to *Creatio ex Nihilo’* Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation 32 (1980): 5-13.


corporeal; who from the very beginning of time by His omnipotent power created out of nothing both the spiritual beings and the corporeal.’ In like manner the Westminster Confession (1646) claims: ‘It pleased God…in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein’ (IV.1). The language of creation ‘out of nothing’ of ‘all things’ both ‘visible and invisible’ does not seem easy to reconcile with the involvement of an amorphous substratum in creation, nor does mere ontological dependence appear to be in view. Rather, these creedal pronouncements seem to understand an absolute beginning of everything other than God.

Nevertheless, due in no small part to the powerful influence of Plato’s ‘creation’ account in *Timaeus*, according to which God (the Demiurge) merely introduced order into a preexisting visible sphere, influential Christians such as Justin Martyr espoused the ontological dependence view. Justin appears to have conceived the Christian doctrine of creation as being compatible with Plato’s account, so that ‘God changed shapeless matter and created the world.’ According to Justin creation amounts to God’s acting upon an amorphous substratum. The modern scientist and theologian John Polkinghorne concurs: ‘The doctrine of creation is not an assertion about what God did in the past to set things going; it is an assertion of what he is doing in the present to maintain the universe in being.’

*_Pace* Justin and others who affirmed the ontological dependence view, the majority of Christian thinkers have traditionally regarded such an understanding of

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21 Justin Martyr, *1 Apology*, 59. For illuminating discussion see Joseph Torchia’s *Creatio Ex Nihilo and the Theology of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 6-8, 12f.

creation as inadequate. Iranaeus, for example, affirms God’s creation of all things from absolutely nothing.\textsuperscript{23} In his classic work \textit{Against Heresies} he tells us that the heretics ‘do not believe that God…created matter itself.’ But, contra the heretics, Iranaeus holds that ‘while men, indeed, cannot make anything out of nothing, but only out of matter already existing, yet God is in this point prominently superior to men, that He Himself called into being the substance of His creation, when previously it had no existence.’\textsuperscript{24} Athanasius, in his \textit{Defence of the Nicene Definition}, is equally clear: ‘For God creates, and to create is also ascribed to men; and God has being, and yet men are said to be, having received from God this gift also. Yet does God create as men do? Or is his being as man’s being? Perish the thought…For God creates, in that he calls what is not into being, needing nothing thereunto.’\textsuperscript{25} St. Augustine likewise describes creation: ‘From what did [God] make them? Out of nothing. That out of which God created all things had neither form nor species, and was simply nothing. Therefore, the world was made out of some unformed matter, that matter was made out of absolutely nothing.’\textsuperscript{26} Iranaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine are not claiming that the universe was formed out of some preexisting, amorphous thing called \textit{nothing}. The claim, rather, is far more ontologically radical: God brought the universe into being out of non-being (stipulating that the language of ‘out of’ does not indicate there was something of which God made use). To put it in Aristotelian terms, creation involved no material cause.


\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Against Heresies}, 2.10.4.

\textsuperscript{25} Athanasius, \textit{Defence of the Nicene Definition}, 3.11.

\textsuperscript{26} Augustine, \textit{De Vera Religione}, xvii, 34-xviii, 36, as quoted in Torchia, \textit{Ex Nihilo and the Theology of St. Augustine}, p. 116.
5.3.2 Divine Eternity and Creation *Ex Nihilo*

Let us assume that one opts for the stronger, temporal origination interpretation of creation *ex nihilo*. Does this understanding comport equally well with the purely atemporal and purely temporal interpretations of divine eternity? It seems not. In fact, I shall argue that neither can accommodate the strong interpretation, whereas accidental temporalism does so nicely. Let us consider each in turn.

As we saw in chapter two, divine atemporalism is incompatible with a tensed theory of time and divine temporalism is incompatible with a tenseless theory of time. Pure atemporalists, recall, affirm that God is utterly beyond time. Once again, Paul Helm is both articulate and representative of the purely atemporal view. He explains creation *ex nihilo* as

the fundamental Christian claim that the universe, the creation of God, is metaphysically contingent. Although God is in some sense necessary, at least to the extent that he has his existence from himself and not from any other, the universe has its source in God, and had God willed it, no universe, or some universe other than ours, would have occurred.  

Helm goes on to clarify that ‘there need be no temporal first moment of creation, and so the universe need not have begun (temporally) to exist, for from the divine standpoint the universe is eternal, even though it exists contingently.’ When Helm claims that the

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27 Helm, ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 47. Helm’s expression of creation is strikingly similar to that of Brian Leftow, who writes: ‘there is no phase of [God’s] life during which He is without a world or time…that action that from temporal perspectives is God’s beginning time and the universe is in eternity just the timeless obtaining of a causal dependence or sustaining relation between God and a world whose time has a first instant’ (*Time and Eternity* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991], pp. 290-291).

28 ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 49. See also Helm’s ‘Eternal Causation’ *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994): 330f, where Helm further discusses his belief that ‘the beginning of the world is not an event in time’.
universe is ‘metaphysically contingent’ upon God, he clearly means that the universe depends upon God for its existence. As we have seen, that much is generally agreed.

Things become less clear, though, when Helm claims ‘the universe is eternal,’ by which he means it has ‘no temporal first moment.’ On this view the universe is co-eternal with God, though it eternally stands in ontological dependence upon God. In other words the common belief that God caused the beginning of the universe a finite time ago is a mistake. According to Helm, the notion of ‘God’s causing the universe’ or some other event $E$ can be spelled out as follows:

(a) If God had not willed $E$, $E$ would not have occurred, (b) God’s willing $E$ ensures that $E$ occurs; and (c) $E$ does not occur at the same time as God’s willing it.\(^{29}\)

Given these criteria, in what sense is an eternal universe contingent? Given Helm’s explanation, it seems to me this must amount to the claim that the actual world contains the state of affairs \textit{God exists} (tenselessly) \textit{with the universe} and not the state of affairs \textit{God does not exist sans the universe}. The relevant sense of contingency, then, is one of merely \textit{logical} contingency. In other words, the atemporalist can agree, on the one hand, that \textit{God exists} (tenselessly) sans \textit{the universe} is indeed a possible state of affairs in some possible world. As Helm claims, God may well have willed a different universe or no universe at all. On the other hand, \textit{God exists} (tenselessly) \textit{with the universe} is also a possible state of affairs, but only in a \textit{different} possible world. These two states of affairs cannot, on the purely atemporalist view, obtain in the same possible world. This

\(^{29}\) Paul Helm, \textit{Eternal God}, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 241. One admires Helm’s honesty when he admits that ‘in a sentence such as “God caused the universe to come into existence”…“caused” is being used with an element of equivocation; its meaning is being stretched’ (Ibid., p. 242).
understanding of creation, therefore, yields only the logical contingence of the universe (i.e., the logical possibility that the universe fail to obtain).\(^\text{30}\)

Alan Padgett, though he is not a proponent of divine atemporalism, has suggested a definition of ‘comes into existence’ that he argues makes sense of creation on the atemporalist view. The difficulty, he suggests, is that we are mistakenly trying to graft the notion of process or becoming onto the atemporalist account.\(^\text{31}\) When we refer to the universe’s ‘beginning to exist’ on this account, we must recall that ‘every physical event only exists (tenselessly) at some time.’\(^\text{32}\) Consider, for example, the birth of Queen Elizabeth I on 7 September 1533. This event does not exist (tenselessly) at all times. It exists (tenselessly) only at that particular time: 7 September 1533. Thus on the tenseless view of time, the birth of Queen Elizabeth I, that is her ‘beginning to exist,’ means that at any and all times earlier than 7 September 1533 she did not exist, and at any and all times later than 7 September 1533 she did exist. Padgett generalizes this thinking into the following definition of ‘comes into existence’: ‘For any object \(X\), and for some time \(T(y)\): \(X\) comes into existence at \(T(y)\) if for any time \(T(y-1)\), \(X\) does not exist-at-\(T(y-1)\) and at \(T(y)\), \(X\) does exist-at-\(T(y)\).’\(^\text{33}\) On this definition, however, it remains difficult to see how creation \textit{ex nihilo} can amount to more than the mere ontological dependence of the universe upon God. For if there is, as Helm makes clear, ‘no temporal first moment’ of the universe, Padgett’s definition allows us to analyze ‘coming into existence’ only


\(^{32}\) \textit{God, Eternity and the Nature of Time}, p. 78.

\(^{33}\) \textit{God, Eternity and the Nature of Time}, p. 79.
within the universe. This is because his definition demands the existence of a reality which can be divided into discernable temporal slices (which just is the static theory of time). But we are not here interested in ‘coming into existence’ within such a reality, we are interested in the coming into existence of that reality itself. It makes no sense to analyze ‘the coming into existence of the universe’ as ‘the universe’s not existing (tenselessly) earlier than some temporal slice but existing (tenselessly) later than some temporal slice,’ because the universe just is the aggregate of those slices.

The strong interpretation of creation ex nihilo, however, demands not merely the logical contingence of the universe, but its metaphysical absence (i.e., the actual, metaphysical absence of the being of the universe). To this the pure atemporalist will reply that her notion of eternal (logical) contingence, whereby creation needn’t obtain but for the willing of God, is all that is needed to substantiate the phrase ‘out of nothing.’ To be clear: the adoption of a tenseless theory of time does guarantee the logical coherence of the ontological origination view of creation. It does not, however, allow for an event of God’s bringing the universe into existence, which proponents of the temporal origination interpretation deem essential to any adequate doctrine of creation ex nihilo. Indeed, as Helm concedes, allowing that a temporal creation event would be sufficient to draw God into time:

if [the coming into existence of the universe] is a temporal event, then we can raise the question whether God exists before (temporally) that event, or at the time of that event, and if the answer to such questions is yes…then God’s timeless eternity would be fatally compromised.  

Let us consider then whether the purely temporal view of divine eternity fares any better.

34 Helm, ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 49.
Pure temporalists about divine eternity can readily agree that all things stand in ontological dependence upon God. This would amount to the claim that God existed through an infinite period of time (whether that period be characterized as empty or metrically amorphous), after which He brought about the beginning of the universe which stands in ontological dependence upon God. Pure temporalism, however, has an inherent advantage over pure atemporalism toward supporting the temporal origination interpretation of creation: the affirmation of the tensed theory of time allows one to understand creation as an event that occurred in the finite past. Thus it can be said that the universe is not coeternal with God. Despite this advantage, two worries face the pure temporalist wishing to adopt the strong rendering of creation *ex nihilo*.

In the first instance it appears that pure temporalism cannot allow God to be the Creator of time itself. The idea is that, if God has existed for an infinite amount of time, then there is no first moment of time. Thus time never began, and so *a fortiori* God cannot have created time. But if God is not the Creator of time, then it seems creation *ex nihilo* is jeopardized. Of course, the force of this worry depends upon one’s understanding of just what is the ontological status of time. Suffice it to say that temporalists of all kinds must account for God’s relation to time *sans* creation. Should the temporalist opt for a view on which time exists apart from God, then it appears God does not create time.

The more substantive worry facing the pure temporalist involves the old question, ‘Why did God not create the world sooner?’ William Alston gets to the heart of the issue:

If God is temporal we have to think of Him as infinitely extended in time...And if the fact that there is a physical universe is due to an act of divine will, that act, if God is temporal, would have to take place at some time. But then at whatever time it takes place God would have
already existed for an infinite period of time; and we would be faced with the Augustinian question of why God chose to create the universe at that time rather than at some other. Thus if we think of God as temporal the most reasonable picture is the Hartshornean one of God and the world confronting each other throughout time as equally basic metaphysically, with God's creative activity confined to bringing it about, so far as possible, that the world is in accordance with His aims. And conversely, if we are to defend the classical doctrine of creation we must think of God as nontemporal.35

If God is omniscient, then it seems difficult to imagine God at \( t_n \) deliberating about whether or not to create at \( t_{n+q} \). Indeed, if God wills to create at all, then—at least as traditionally conceived—He always so wills. So, with God existing through a literally infinite amount of time before the moment of creation, the question naturally arises: why did He delay creating? It may be suggested that at some moment \( t_{n+q} \) God suddenly acquires a sufficient reason which He lacked at \( t_n \). If so, such a reason must come from either within or without God. The former seems ruled out by His omniscience (surely an omniscient God would already know any such reason), while the latter seems unwelcome because the whole point of creation ex nihilo is that there is nothing other than God. In the absence of any sufficient reason for an omniscient God to delay creating for an infinite amount of time until \( t_n \), then, it seems we have good reason to question the pure temporalists’ ability to accommodate robust creation ex nihilo.

As a via media between the purely atemporalist and purely temporalist positions, accidental temporalism deftly avoids the inadequacies of each in accommodating the temporal origination view of creation ex nihilo. While readily affirming the ontological dependence of all things upon God, accidental temporalism agrees with the pure

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ateemporalist that the universe is logically contingent. In other words, the accidental
temporalist can agree that the existence of the universe is contingent upon God’s will.
With the pure temporalist, however, she agrees that mere logical contingency is not
enough; temporal origination demands the metaphysical absence of the universe. As we
have seen, accidental temporalism coherently affirms in the actual world both requisite
states of affairs: God exists (tenselessly) sans the universe and God exists temporally with
the universe. The former stipulates the complete absence—that is, the non-being—of the
universe, which temporal origination demands. Thus creation is a tensed event, occurring
at a moment in the finite past; the universe is not co-eternal with God. Unlike the pure
temporalist, the accidental temporalist need not qualify ‘universe’ to exclude time; God is
the Creator, the temporal originator, of all things, including time. Further, on accidental
temporalism God need not exist through an infinite amount of time prior to creation,
which avoids the insuperable difficulty of God’s having no sufficient reason to create at a
particular moment. Therefore the Christian theist who wishes to affirm the stronger
interpretation of creation ex nihilo, temporal origination, has as a plausible option the
accidental temporalist model of divine eternity.

5.4 Divine Eternity and the Pre-existence of Christ

After centuries of debate over the Son’s nature and His relation to the Father, in
AD 451 most of the Christian Church adopted a Christological statement that
accommodated, within the Trinitarian framework, both the full deity and full humanity of
Christ: the Chalcedonian definition.\textsuperscript{36} That the Son is of one essence with the Father and

\textsuperscript{36} Though the focus of this section is Christ’s pre-existence, it should be noted that the Incarnation itself is
the basis for compelling arguments in favor of divine temporality. See, for example, Garrett DeWeese, \textit{God
and the Nature of Time} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 232-234; and Thomas Senor, ‘Incarnation and
therefore is fully God had been asserted at Nicaea. Precisely how to conceive of God as incarnate in the man Jesus of Nazareth and the implications of such belief, however, demanded further careful consideration. It is now generally agreed that whatever we say about Christ must be in line with Chalcedon, which enjoins us to affirm of Christ that this selfsame one is perfect both in deity and also in human-ness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man...He is of the same essence [homoousion] as God as far as his deity is concerned, and of the same essence as we are ourselves as far as his human-ness is concerned.

Indeed, ‘in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form’ (Col. 2.9). Such Incarnational Christology is the touchstone of the Christian faith, and crucial to an orthodox understanding of the Incarnation is the pre-existence of Christ. Therefore any acceptable expression of Christ’s pre-existence can impugn neither his full deity nor his full humanity, on pain of heresy.\(^{37}\) In other words, any acceptable expression of Christ’s pre-existence must account for at least three criteria:

1. the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, did not begin to exist,
2. the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, assumed a human nature and became incarnate, and

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\(^{37}\) Thus we shall dismiss Arius’ claim that the hallmark of divinity is ‘unbegottenness,’ so that the Father is divine but ‘there was when [the Logos] was not.’ According to Arius, then, the Logos was not of the same essence of the Father. Arius did affirm that the Logos pre-existed the Incarnation, but nevertheless came into existence as the first of all created things (for discussion, see Millard Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991], pp. 41-88 and Gerald Bray, s.v. ‘The Trinity’, in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, et al. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988], p. 692). We shall also dismiss the view of Marcellus, who, in his zeal to reject Arianism, embraced a merely etiological understanding of the Son (for discussion, see Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, vol. 3: Nicene and Post-nicene Christianity from Constantine the Great to Gregory the Great* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], pp. 651ff).
qua incarnate, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, is both fully
divine and fully human.

In line with these criteria, the Chalcedonian creed states: ‘Before time began\textsuperscript{38} he was
begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these “last days”…this selfsame
one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness.’ It is
apparent, then, that personal pre-existence is in view. The Incarnation does not mark the
coming into existence of a person distinct from the second person of the Trinity, the
Logos. One’s conception of divine eternity, then, must be compatible with these
considerations. I shall argue that the ‘eternally incarnate’ view of Christ’s pre-existence
held by advocates of the purely atemporal position, though logically coherent, results in
an attenuated Christology. On the other hand advocates of a temporal understanding of
divine eternity, such as accidental temporalists, affirm a ‘temporally incarnate’ view of
Christ’s pre-existence which smartly accommodates the above considerations.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{5.4.1 Desiderata of Pre-existence of Christ}

The question of what it is that Christ pre-exists—the creation of the cosmos or the
Incarnation—naturally arises. Scripture is clear that the second person of the Trinity, the
Logos, is the agent of creation and did not in any sense begin to exist (cf. John 1.1-3 and
Col. 1.15-17). In a sense it is true to say that Christ ‘pre-exists’ the creation of the
cosmos, though it must be noted that this language is potentially misleading for (as was
argued in previous chapters) there is no literal ‘pre’ or ‘before’ the first moment of time.
Thus ‘pre-existence’ refers to the personal existence of the second person of the Trinity,

\textsuperscript{38} Compare this to the language of the Constantinopolitan Creed: ‘We believe…in one Lord Jesus

Christ…begotten of the Father before all time’ (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{39} ‘Temporally incarnate’ should in no way be confused with ‘temporarily incarnate’: I do not mean to

imply that the Incarnation is in any way a transitory state.

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the Logos, before the Incarnation. It does not, indeed cannot, refer to the pre-existence of
the human Jesus of Nazareth. As Gerald O’Collins explains,

personal pre-existence does not mean that Jesus eternally pre-existed qua Jesus. His humanity came first into existence as such around 5 B.C. The human consciousness of Jesus did not pre-exist ‘in heaven.’ To claim that would be to threaten the genuineness of his humanity. The consciousness which did pre-exist was the divine consciousness of the eternal Logos…By assuming a full human existence and history, the person of the Logos came also to be known as Jesus.\(^{40}\)

No human being pre-exists their own birth, including the human Jesus. Maintaining the
pre-existence of Jesus’ humanity or even the human nature of Jesus would be in sharp
conflict with Chalcedon. To speak of ‘Christ’s pre-existence,’ then, is to speak of the
existence of the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, before the Incarnation.

There is considerable biblical evidence, both presupposed and explicit in the text,
for affirming the pre-existence of Christ.\(^{41}\) John’s Gospel is straightforward: ‘In the
beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The
Word was with God in the beginning…Now the Word became flesh [σάρξ ἐγένετο] and
took up residence among us’ (John 1.1-2, 14; cf. Heb. 1.2-3). While the second person of
the Trinity, the Logos, is co-eternal with the Father, he nevertheless became incarnate.
Jesus himself asserts his own pre-existence: ‘I tell you the solemn truth, before Abraham
came into existence, I am!’ (John 8.58),\(^{42}\) and ‘now, Father, glorify me at your side with


\(^{42}\) As Leon Morris notes, ‘Whether we translate “before Abraham was” (KJV) or “was born” (NIV, etc.) the meaning will be “came into existence,” as the aorist tense indicates. A mode of being that has a definite
the glory I had with you before the world was created’ (John 17.5). Pauline references to Christ seem comfortably to presuppose Christ’s pre-existence: ‘For what the Law could not do…God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh…He condemned sin in the flesh’ (Rom. 8.3). Discussing the heirs of God’s promise in salvation, Paul claims that ‘when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law’ (Gal. 4.4). In an oft-discussed text, Paul speaks of Jesus’ self-emptying: ‘though he existed in the form of God…(Christ Jesus) emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, by coming in the likeness of people, and by sharing in human nature’ (Phil. 2.6-7). These texts portray the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, as personally pre-existing the Incarnation; Scripture plainly posits a state of affairs in which the Logos exists as non-incarnate, as well as a state of affairs in which the Logos exists as incarnate, though the two states obviously do not obtain simultaneously.

5.4.2 Divine Eternity and the Pre-existence of Christ

Once more I shall interact with Paul Helm as representative of contemporary pure atemporalists. In line with criteria (1) above, Helm affirms that ‘the first moment of the life of Jesus Christ was not the first moment of the life of the Logos, for there was no such moment.’ This affirmation that the Logos did not begin to exist at the moment of the Incarnation, as we have seen, is essential to orthodoxy. Difficulties arise, however, with the attempt to reconcile this belief with the atemporalist understanding of divine eternity.


43 Helm, Eternal God, p. 257.
According to Helm, ‘if the doctrine of the Incarnation is true then the eternal Son of God is in the closest possible union with what changes, while not himself changing, and the other persons of the Trinity continue to enjoy a timelessly eternal standpoint vis-à-vis the Incarnate second person.’ Helm must regard the person of the Son as eternally unchanging, for to change is to be in time. As we have seen Helm is committed to the timelessness of God as well as the divinity of the Son, and so cannot affirm the temporality of the Son. But this leads Helm into rocky and treacherous theological waters, as when he claims that ‘there is no time in [God the Son’s] existence when he was not incarnate, though since he became incarnate at a particular time in our history there were times in that history before the incarnation, and times since.’ What can this mean? The claim that there is no time in the existence of the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, when he was not incarnate—that is, that there is no state of affairs involving an un-incarnate second person of the Trinity—coupled with the claim that he became incarnate at a point in history seem to suggest that God the Son came into existence at a point in history, which surely is not Helm’s position.

Given his espousal of the tenseless theory of time, the pure atemporalist understands the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, to be eternally incarnate. Helm writes, ‘there is therefore no sense in talking of the eternal Son of God apart from the incarnation…That is, there is no point to it if by this we mean there was a time when the eternal Son of God existed unincarnated.’ Here we have an unambiguous assertion that the Logos is eternally incarnate in the human Jesus of Nazareth. Atemporalist Eleonore

44 Eternal God, p. 256.
45 Helm, ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 54.
46 ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 54.
Stump seems to agree: ‘The divine nature of the second person of the Trinity, like the
divine nature of either of the other persons of the Trinity, cannot become temporal; nor
could the second person at some time acquire a human nature he does not *eternally have*.
Instead, the second person eternally has two nature; and at some temporal instants…the
human nature of the second person has been temporally actual. At those times and only in
that nature, the second person directly participates in temporal events.’\(^{47}\) For
atemporalists such as Helm and Stump, to claim otherwise would be to admit change
(i.e., an event) which would imply temporality.

What does this mean for the doctrine of Christ’s pre-existence? On this point
Helm is emphatic:

> there is no preexistent Christ with a life history independent of and prior to the incarnation. There was no time when the eternal God was not Jesus of Nazareth…. God did not exist and then at some later point decide to become incarnate, for there is no change or succession possible in the timeless eternity of God’s life.\(^{48}\)

Given the view that all times exist on an ontological par, the most this can mean is that
there is a tenseless moment \(t_2\) at which the second person of the Trinity is not incarnate
and there is a series of tenseless moments \(t_5\) through \(t_n\) at which the second person of the
Trinity *eternally* is incarnate.\(^{49}\) In other words, given the tenseless theory of time, things
and events are eternally fixed within the B-series framework: the second person of the
Trinity *eternally* (tenselessly) exists at \(t_2\) as non-incarnate, and the second person of the
Trinity *eternally* (tenselessly) exists at \(t_5\) through \(t_n\) as incarnate. But this seems to rule
out any such state of affairs as *the Logos exists as non-incarnate*, because on Helm’s

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\(^{48}\) ‘Divine Timeless Eternity,’ p. 54.

view the state of affairs the Logos exists as incarnate from $t_5$ through $t_n$ eternally obtains. So, the pure atemporalist’s doctrine of Christ’s pre-existence, then, can at most satisfy criteria (1) and (3) above. As for (2), Helm denies that the second person of the Trinity became incarnate or that there can be any before or after the Incarnation because the Logos is eternally incarnate. It is difficult to see how any pure atemporalist could do other than Helm, who unequivocally denies that the Incarnation is an event. Yet the prima facie case in favor of (2) is impressive. From an exegetical standpoint, Scripture explicitly claims (see above) that the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, became flesh. The language of John’s Gospel is that ‘the Word became flesh’ [σάρξ ἐγένετο].

Echoing the creedal expressions, Athanasius explains:

> the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.

Yet if the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, is timelessly incarnate, then (as Helm claims) he does not become flesh. Moreover, the language of Chalcedon implies the Incarnation was a change, an event, in time: ‘Before time began he was begotten of the Father…now in these “last days” this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin.’ The Fathers seem to be saying that the begottenness of the Logos is timeless, whereas the Incarnation occurred in these ‘last days’. The Fathers seem to be drawing a distinction between atemporality and temporality; if they had wanted to express the Incarnation as

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50 Helm denies that Scripture’s many claims that the divine life involves time and change are to be taken literally: ‘On the eternalist view, in revealing his will God must accommodate himself to human spatiotemporal conditions by the use of sensory, figurative, anthropomorphic language about himself, particularly by using the language of change’ (Helm, ‘Response to Critics,’ p. 78).

51 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 2.8 (emphasis added). Compare this to Nicaea: the Logos ‘came down and was incarnate, becoming human…’
eternal in the sense of timeless, the language of ‘before all times’ could easily have been maintained. Thus, though the ‘eternally incarnate’ explanation of the Incarnation is logically coherent, it nevertheless offers an attenuated doctrine of Christ’s pre-existence in the sense that it cannot affirm any such state of affairs as the Logos exists as non-incarnate. Consequently, it cannot adequately account for the language of ‘becoming’ flesh.52

Proponents of the ‘temporally incarnate’ view of Christ, including accidental temporalists, agree with Helm that the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, did not begin to exist in any sense. They also agree that qua incarnate, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, is both fully divine and fully human, although this is not understood as meaning the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, is eternally (i.e., timelessly) both divine and human. Rather, this claim is understood in terms of criteria (2): the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, assumed a human nature and became incarnate. In other words, this is understood in genuinely tensed terms: since on this view it is not the case that all times exist on an ontological par, there was a time (after the first moment of time) when the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, was non-incarnate (and the person Jesus of Nazareth did not exist in any sense). Then, at a later point in time (what we

52 Though doing so is beyond our present purposes, it should be noted that some proponents of the ‘eternally incarnate’ view, such as Frank Herbert Brabant, maintain that in the Incarnation ‘the two Natures of Christ correspond to the eternal and the temporal; the temporal process of His Life perfectly imitates the Eternal, but it adds nothing to it and takes nothing from it’ (Frank Herbert Brabant, in his Bampton Lectures, published under the title Time and Eternity in Christian Thought [New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936], p. 268). The idea seems to be that the human nature of the Incarnate Christ is temporal, while the divine nature of the Incarnate Christ is atemporal. Among the difficulties raised by this suggested understanding, however, is the apparent implication that Christ’s human nature would be an eternal characteristic of the second Person of the Trinity (which seems to run afoul of the Christian confession that the second Person was ‘begotten not created’). Elaboration of this implication may be found in Thomas Schärl, ‘Why We Need God’s Eternity: Some Remarks to Support a Classic Notion,’ in God, Eternity, and Time, eds. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp. 54-61. The implications of the ‘eternally incarnate’ view is thoroughly considered in Richard Holland, ‘God and Time: Re-Thinking the Relationship in Light of the Incarnation of Christ,’ (Ph. D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).
might call these “last days”), the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, became (literally) incarnate by assuming a human nature. Since on this view the moments of time do not exist on an ontological par, the moment of the Incarnation event marked the first moment of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. This proposal satisfies all three criteria, makes sense of the straightforward language of Scripture, and is in line with the creedal language of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Therefore, since the ‘temporally incarnate’ view is compatible only with temporalist understandings of divine eternity such as accidental temporalism (and its commitment to the tensed theory of time), we have another reason for affirming such a view of divine eternality.

5.5 Divine Eternity and the Persons of the Trinity

The worship of God as a Holy Trinity is a touchstone of the Christian Church. As Gerald Bray explains, ‘from the beginning, the Christian knowledge of God in Trinity was first experiential and later theoretical, an order of things that has always characterized authentic Christian understanding and confession.53 This experience is particularly evident, for example, in the earliest Christian baptismal rites, as expressed in the command of Matthew 28.19 to ‘make disciples…baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ Another example of the spiritual experience which gave rise to the early Christian belief in the Trinity is encapsulated in Galatians 4.6 (‘Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: “Abba! Father!”’), which Bray shows to be essentially Trinitarian.54 That the earliest Christians were Trinitarian is clear, although ‘these early Christians lacked…a conceptual


framework which would allow them to express their belief that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were all equally God, without sacrificing their commitment to the monotheism of the Old Testament.\footnote{Gerald Bray, \textit{The Doctrine of God} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 153.} Tracing fully the history of the attempts to develop this conceptual framework is well beyond our present purposes.\footnote{Helpful discussions along such lines may be found in Fred Sanders, \textit{The Image of The Imminent Trinity: Rahner’s Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture} (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 15-46; John Feinberg, \textit{No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God} (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 437-500; Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, \textit{The Trinity} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), pp. 15-118; Bray, \textit{The Doctrine of God}, pp. 111-196; John H. Leith, \textit{Basic Christian Doctrine} (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 46-50.}

Subsequent centuries witnessed protracted debate within the Church over how to conceptualize (or at least articulate the doctrine of) the Trinity, with the Nicene statement of 325 (ratified and expanded in the Constantinopolitan statement of 381) being widely adopted as an acceptable expression of Trinitarian belief. At Nicaea, largely in response to the Arian controversy of the fourth century, the full deity of the Son was insisted upon. Affirming belief in ‘one God’ who is three persons, the Creed definitively claims with respect to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that He is ‘begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father…true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence [\textit{homoousios}] as the Father…’\footnote{John H. Leith, \textit{Creeds of the Churches}, 3d ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 31ff. The Creed affirms the full deity of the Holy Spirit, as well, by identifying the Sprit as ‘the Lord and life giver…Who is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.’ For present purposes, however, I shall limit the scope of the section to the Father and the Son.} As helpful as this formula proved to be toward expressing the Church’s Trinitarian belief, however, questions remained. Notable among these was the question of the Son’s relation to the Father within the Godhead. Specifically, in what sense is the Son equal to the Father if He is (in some sense) subordinate to the Father? Scripture does, after all, use the language of both
equality and subordination.\textsuperscript{58} Jesus Himself says, for example: ‘…the Father is greater than I am… I am doing just what the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father’ (John 14. 28-31; cf. John 14.10, where Jesus emphasizes that his words and actions draw their authority from the Father). At the same time, passages such as the prologue of John clearly affirm Jesus’ equality with the Father: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning’ (John 1.1-2, cf. John 10.30, where Jesus claims, ‘The Father and I are one’).\textsuperscript{59}

In seeking to resolve this apparent antinomy, Christian theologians have generally accepted a useful distinction between the ‘economic’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity, that is, respectively, the way in which God is revealed through salvific history and the way in which God exists eternally irregardless of creation.\textsuperscript{60} Couched in these terms, the question is whether the subordination of the economic Trinity reflects eternal realities within the immanent Trinity. That the Son is (at least temporally) functionally subordinate to the Father in the economic Trinity is, as near as I can tell, not denied by

\textsuperscript{58} Though it has become well-established in the literature, the ambiguity inherent in the term ‘subordination(ism)’ seems to obfuscate the issues. To most people the term implies inferiority, whereas a term such as ‘submission’—which is possible only if the parties concerned are equal—would seem preferable. Thus, to say that the Son is eternally submissive to the Father communicates clearly what is intended.


\textsuperscript{60} Although the concreteness of this distinction was challenged by Karl Rahner, who argued that ‘The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity,’ which axiom has come to be referred to as ‘Rahner’s rule’ (Rahner, \textit{The Trinity}, trans. J. Donceel [New York: Crossroad, 1997; orig. 1967], p. 22) and has been the focus of considerable debate (see, e.g., Sanders, \textit{The Image of The Imminent Trinity: Rahner’s Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture}, pp. 47ff; Randal Rauser, ‘Rahner’s Rule: An Emperor without Clothes?’ \textit{International Journal of Systematic Theology} 7/1 [2005]: 81-94).
any Christian theologian. In keeping with the Nicene and Constantinopolitan statements, there is likewise agreement that we cannot affirm the ontological subordination or inferiority of the Son to the Father (i.e., Arianism), although as we shall see some scholars, such as Kevin Giles, insist that ‘once the word eternal is added to the word subordination, you have ontological subordination.’

5.5.1 Complementarianism versus Egalitarianism

In keeping with the literature on the subject, I shall refer to the two primary sides of this debate as the complementarians and the egalitarians. The former affirm, firstly, that the Son is homoousion with the Father, that is, the Son is fully and equally God in every respect. In no sense is the Son ever ontologically inferior to the Father. Second, the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father within the economic Trinity. This functional subordination, however, is not confined to the economic Trinity; the functional subordination of the economic Trinity is reflective of an eternal reality within the immanent Trinity: the Son is voluntarily and lovingly eternally subordinate in function to the Father. According to Wayne Grudem,

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61 As Millard Erickson observes, within this debate ‘both parties…believe there is one God existing in three persons, and these three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are, as to their nature or their being, fully and equally God’ (Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate [Grand Rapids. MI: Kregel, 2009], p. 17).

62 Kevin Giles, Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 28. Giles goes on to identify as one of his book’s basic arguments that ‘to speak of the eternal subordination of the Son in function and authority by necessity implies ontological subordinationism’ (op. cit., p. 30). Giles expands his arguments (casting his thesis as a ‘defense of the doctrine of the eternal begetting or generation of the Son’) in The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

63 Although alternative labels, such as the ‘gradational authority view’ and the ‘equivalent authority view’ have been suggested (by Erickson), ‘complementarianism’ and ‘egalitarianism’ are the predominant terms.

64 Again, our focus is on the Son’s relationship to the Father. For a lucid discussion of the relations of the Holy Spirit within the Godhead, see Gerald Bray’s ‘The Filioque Clause in History and Theology,’ Tyndale Bulletin 34 (1983): 91-144, as well as his ‘The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit In Evangelical Theology Today: Do We Still Need It?’ Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 41 (1998): 415-
Another way of expressing this more simply would be to say ‘equal in being but subordinate in role.’ Both parts of this phrase are necessary to a true doctrine of the Trinity: If we do not have ontological equality, not all the persons are fully God. But if we do not have economic subordination,—then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity.65

As Grudem indicates, underlying the complementarian position is a certain understanding of the hypostases of the Father and Son. While equal in ousia, what is it that distinguishes these hypostases from one another? Following the Cappadocian fathers, complementarians typically locate the distinction in the relationship between the Father and Son—specifically, in the Son’s begottenness from the Father. As Gregory of Nyssa explained, it is ‘in regard to the attributes indicative of the Persons [that] our belief in Him is distinguished into belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.’66 In other words, the distinction is expressed in terms of the Father’s unbegottenness and the Son’s begottenness. According to Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘This is what we mean by Father and Son… The Father is the Begetter and the Emitter…[t]he Son is the Begotten…’67 Thus the Son is who he is because of who the Father is; the Son draws his identity from the hypostasis of the Father. Part of the hypostasis of the Son, therefore, is eternal functional subordination to the Father. Implicit within this understanding of the hypostases is the assumption that God reveals himself within the economic Trinity as he actually is within

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67 Gregory of Nazianzus, The Third Theological Oration, 29.2, in Ibid., p. 7:301.
the immanent Trinity. ‘If we claim to know God as he truly is,’ Bray explains, ‘we have to believe that God dwells in himself in the same way that he reveals himself to us, that is, according to the same pattern of relationships.’\textsuperscript{68} If this is not so, then it seems most if not all our putative knowledge about God is jeopardized. According to complementarians, then, the first person of the Trinity is \textit{eternally} identified as the \textit{hypostasis} of the unbegotten Father, and the second person of the Trinity is \textit{eternally} identified as the \textit{hypostasis} of the begotten Son.

Egalitarians, on the other hand, though in agreement that the Son is \textit{homoousion} with the Father in every respect, insist that the functional subordination of the Son to the Father within the economic Trinity is strictly confined to the economic Trinity. Far from reflecting any eternal reality within the immanent Trinity, the functional subordination within the economic Trinity is a voluntary and temporary arrangement between equals. As Thomas McCall and Keith Yandell put it,

\textit{The subordination of Jesus Christ is this: it is his freely chosen submission ‘for us and our salvation.’ The person of the Son is truly subordinate only for ‘economic’ reasons, and only insofar as these reasons entail being subordinate…even while his full divinity, equality, and communion with the Father and Holy Spirit continues unabated, world without end.}\textsuperscript{69}

There is thus no subordination, authority, or hierarchy of any sort between the Son and the Father within the immanent Trinity. A good many egalitarians maintain that to admit

\textsuperscript{68} Bray, \textit{The Doctrine of God}, p. 160. J. Scott Horrell echoes this point: ‘Most Evangelicals will insist that biblical revelation corresponds to who and what God truly is. While there may be hiddenness, incomprehensibility, and even (in apophatic theology) \textit{darkness}, there are no masks—as the incarnation and the cross powerfully demonstrate. God is honest, true, and genuine in communicating himself. I presuppose that the economic Trinity as revealed in the Bible accurately represents to finite creation who and what God is, but that the economic Trinity is by no means all that God is’ (‘Toward A Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order,’ \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 47 [2004]: 400).

eternal subordination of any sort would be to admit ontological subordination within the immanent Trinity. Giles, who consistently seems to conflate the notion of ‘being’ with that of ‘person,’ asserts that ‘once the word eternal is added to the word subordination, you have ontological subordination.’

McCall and Yandell agree that eternal functional subordination ‘entails that the Father and the Son do not share the same nature after all.’

This is because, they argue, if the Son eternally has the property of being functionally subordinate to the Father (which property the Father obviously lacks) and the Father eternally has the property of being functionally authoritative over the Son (which property the Son obviously lacks), then there is in the nature of the Son an essential property that is not in the nature of the Father and there is in the nature of the Father an essential property that is not in the nature of the Son. They maintain that this entails ontological subordination within the Godhead. It is for this reason that egalitarians deny eternal subordination of any sort with the Trinity.

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70 Kevin Giles, Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 28. He similarly remarks that ‘If the divine Son is eternally subordinated in role or function, he is a subordinated divine person. His subordination as it is eternal defines his person. In other words, he is subordinated in being’ (op. cit., p. 46; cf. pp. 57-59). For this reason Egalitarian Phillip Carey, in a bulletin mailed in 2011 to all members of the Evangelical Theological Society, goes so far as to deem complementarianism a ‘new version of ancient heresy’ which he finds ‘astonishing’ (‘The New Evangelical Subordinationism: Reading Inequality Into the Trinity,’ Man, Woman, and the Triune God, special issue of the journal by Christians for Biblical Equality [2011]: 26).


72 It is beyond the purpose of this section to evaluate and respond to this argument, but two questions are worth raising: (1) might this argument prove too much? After all, the second person of the Trinity eternally has the property of not being the first person of the Trinity and the first person of the Trinity eternally has the property of not being the second person of the Trinity. Since these properties are not shared by the Son and Father then, according to McCall and Yandell’s reasoning, this too would seem to entail that the first and second persons of the Trinity do not share the same nature. In other words, their argument seems to question the very coherence of the Trinity (though that is not their intention). And (2) does the argument equivocate on the term ‘nature’? After all, it seems plausible to hold that the individual persons of the Trinity have exclusive properties (such as being the second person of the Trinity—a property surely the first and third persons do not possess, or of being begotten of the Father) while nevertheless sharing equally the divine nature. We might appeal, for example, to the notion of haecceities (that is, properties without which a given person could not exist, but which are such that no other person could possibly have them). This position is developed nicely by Richard Brian Davis (see his ‘Haecceities, Individuation and
5.5.2 Complementarianism, Egalitarianism, and Divine Eternity

Having distinguished between complementarianism and egalitarianism, let us now consider the implications of each for divine eternality. Clearly whatever we say vis-à-vis relations within the Trinity must be consistent with what we say vis-à-vis God’s relationship to time. Let us first consider the complementarian view. Complementarianism appears to be perfectly compatible with either pure temporalism, pure atemporalism, or accidental temporalism. In the first case, the Son always has been (and always will be) functionally subordinate to the Father at each successive moment of A-theoretic time. There is no time at which the Son fails to be functionally subordinate to the Father. In the second case, at all of the co-existent B-theoretic moments of time the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father. In the third case, sans creation the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father and subsequent to creation the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father at each successive movement of A-theoretic time. Each of these are logically coherent models.

When we turn to the egalitarian view, however, things are less clear. In the first case, egalitarianism is incompatible with the purely temporal view. To see why this is so, recall the egalitarian denial that the economic Trinity implies eternal truths about the immanent Trinity. The immanent Trinity, they insist, is characterized by absolute equality in every sense among the divine persons. As Gilbert Bilezikian puts it, ‘because there was no order of subordination within the Trinity prior to the Second Person’s incarnation,
there will remain no such thing after its completion. But if this is so, then it seems (contrary to the Cappadocian tradition described above) the ‘Father and Son’ roles of the economic Trinity could have been assumed by any of the divine persons. This is because the role of Father in the economic Trinity is characterized as being authoritative over the Son, while the role of Son in the economic Trinity is characterized as being functionally subordinate to the Father. Since egalitarians deny there is any authority or subordination inherent among the persons of the immanent Trinity, it follows that no particular divine person (in the immanent Trinity) must assume any particular role within the economic Trinity. Thus, on this view the persons of the immanent Trinity are Person A₁, Person A₂, and Person A₃. If this is so, the question naturally arises: what led to the assuming of particular economic roles (‘Father and Son’) by particular persons of the immanent Trinity? As near as I can tell, this question has so far gone unanswered by egalitarians. Yet this much seems clear: there must have been, on this view, a mutual decision at some point in the finite past as to which divine person would assume which economic role. Laying aside the potential difficulties such a decision may raise for one’s understanding of omniscience, the egalitarian view seems to lack any non-ad hoc grounds for denying modalism. In other words, if as egalitarians hold God’s self-revelation in Scripture does not reveal God as he truly is in himself, then on what basis can egalitarians affirm that God is three persons and not simply one person wearing three different masks? It can plainly be affirmed that within the economic Trinity there is, temporarily, functional subordination of the Son to the Father and a clear distinction between three separate

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74 I am not claiming that all egalitarians affirm the heresy of modalism. My claim, rather, is that the egalitarian position—though rightly professing orthodox Trinitarianism—has no firm basis for denying modalism.
economic roles. However, if this revelation holds only within the economic Trinity, then it is difficult to see any basis on which to extend the one and not the other to the immanent Trinity. Beyond this, a greater difficulty looms for egalitarians seeking to affirm the purely temporal view of God. As we have seen, on the purely temporal view God has existed through an infinite number of past (A-theoretic) times. We have also seen that on egalitarianism there must have been a mutual decision at some time $T_n$ in the finite past as to which divine person would assume which economic role. Yet by definition there was prior to $T_n$ an infinite amount of time, and so we may naturally ask why God at $T_{n-q}$ delayed this decision. In short, why didn’t God decide on the economic roles sooner? If God is omniscient, then it seems difficult to imagine God at $T_{n-q}$ deliberating about whether or not to decide at $T_n$. It may be suggested that at some moment $T_n$ God suddenly acquires a sufficient reason which He lacked at $T_{n-q}$. If so, such a reason must come from either within or without God. The former seems ruled out by His omniscience (for surely an omniscient God would already know any such reason), while it is difficult to imagine a candidate for the latter (which in any case would jeopardize creation ex nihilo). Thus egalitarianism is incompatible with the purely temporal view.

Egalitarianism fares no better with the purely atemporal conception of God. On that conception, as we have seen, the universe is co-eternal with God and all moments of time exist on an ontological par (i.e., the B-theory of time). Now, according to the egalitarian view, the divine persons are economically related to one another at all moments at which God participates with creation. But since all such moments are eternally co-existent with God, it follows that there is no time at which the divine persons
are not economically related. This, of course, is a most unwelcome conclusion for egalitarians, because it jeopardizes the distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity. If there is no time at which the divine persons fail to be related economically, then neither can there be a time at which the divine persons mutually decide which divine person will assume which economic role, nor can there be a time at which the divine persons are immanently related. Further, on this understanding it can only counterfactually be true that the immanent Trinity even exist. In other words, if God had refrained either from creating or assuming economic roles, then the immanent Trinity would exist. But on the purely atemporal model, creation (and thus God’s economic relations) exists eternally. Therefore, on this understanding egalitarians must agree with complementarians that the Son is in fact eternally subordinate to the Father. Since this undermines the egalitarians’ claim, egalitarianism is incompatible with the purely atemporal view.

It seems that only a hybrid of the purely temporal and purely atemporal models, such as accidental temporalism, can accommodate the egalitarian view. To be clear, accidental temporalists are in no way committed to egalitarianism. However, in order to be coherent, egalitarians must affirm something like accidental temporalism. On this understanding sans creation God is non-economically related, but at some point in the finite past (say, at the moment of creation) the divine persons assumed economic roles. Accidental temporalism thus preserves the crucial (and real—that is, not merely counterfactual) egalitarian distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity, which the purely atemporal view threatened. It also allows for the egalitarian

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75 I here use the term ‘immanent Trinity’ simply to denote a non-economic Trinity.
claim that at some future moment the economic roles cease. On accidental temporalism God does not delay for an infinite amount of time the decision as to which divine person will assume which economic role, and so overcomes the objection to the purely temporal view. Therefore, while the complementarian view is logically compatible with each of these views of God’s relation to time, those wishing coherently to affirm egalitarianism have recourse only to the accidental temporalist conception of divine eternality.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that, in addition to accounting for a robust view of divine omniscience, objective temporal becoming, the tensed nature of time, and God’s genuine relations with the world, accidental temporalism can bring considerable light to bear on familiar theological questions. Nicholas Everitt’s charge of incoherence within the concept of God, particularly regarding the attribute of divine eternity, is to be taken seriously. Indeed, his arguments that neither pure atemporalism nor pure temporalism are satisfactory understandings of divine eternity seem to me sound. Everitt’s conclusion that God (at least as traditionally conceived) does not exist, however, was shown to be hasty. It was shown that accidental temporalism neatly avoids each of Everitt’s objections and preserves the coherence of the divine attributes. Regarding the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, accidental temporalism accommodates the temporal origination understanding, which affirms that while all things stand in ontological dependence upon God, creation ex nihilo is God’s literally bringing the universe into existence out of nothing whatsoever. This understanding is motivated by Scriptural and creedal pronouncements. Pure atemporalism, on the other hand, claims the universe is co-eternal with God, whereas accidental temporalism insists the universe began to exist a finite time ago.
temporalism can offer no satisfying answer to the enduring question, ‘Why did God not create the world sooner?’ On accidental temporalism, though, God need not exist through an infinite amount of time prior to creation, which avoids the insuperable difficulty of God’s having no sufficient reason to create at a particular moment. Regarding the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ, only the ‘temporally incarnate’ understanding of the Incarnation, which accidental temporalism holds, can accommodate all three Chalcedonian criteria. The ‘eternally incarnate’ view of atemporalists, though logically coherent, cannot satisfactorily explain the Scriptural and creedal portrayal of the Incarnation as an event and so results in an attenuated Christology. Finally, regarding the debate between complementarians and egalitarians over the intra-Trinitarian relations within both the economic and the immanent Trinity, it was shown that the complementarian view is compatible with either pure temporalism, pure atemporalism, or accidental temporalism. On the purely temporal model, however, egalitarianism can offer no satisfying response to the question, why God didn’t decide on the economic roles sooner? On the purely atemporal understanding, the crucial egalitarian distinction between the economic and the immanent Trinity is undermined because there is on this view no time at which the divine persons are not economically related. Accidental temporalism, however, deftly avoids these difficulties and offers a coherent model for understanding egalitarianism. Thus the philosophical and theological capital of accidental temporalism makes it very attractive as an understanding of God’s relation to time.
Chapter 6:

Summary and Conclusion

Throughout this thesis we have been thinking about God’s relationship to time and in particular the ‘accidental temporalist’ model proposed by William Lane Craig. The purpose of this thesis is to argue that Craig’s model of accidental temporalism constitutes a philosophically robust understanding of God’s relation to time that is logically coherent, can hold its place despite the philosophical objections which have been raised against it, and is not only consistent with but sheds considerable light on key Christian doctrines. I would like to conclude the thesis by drawing together some of my conclusions in summary fashion, as well as by pointing out some possibilities for future research emerging from this project. Some of these suggestions for future research will be mere sketches, but it will be fruitful nevertheless to provide a brief idea of some areas for further exploration.

In chapter one I provided an overview of several foundational issues relevant to the development of my thesis. In terms of methodology, I approach my thesis as a Christian philosophical theologian. This means that, among other things, I take as my starting point the teachings of Scripture: whatever is said about God’s relation to time must be consistent with Scripture. I therefore started off by looking at the relevant biblical data.

The Christian scriptures teach that God, the Maker and Master of heaven and earth, is ‘the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity’ (Is. 57.15); He is ‘the Eternal God’ (Gen. 21.33). According to traditional Christian doctrine, this means, minimally, that God
neither began to exist nor will He pass out of existence; indeed, God exists ‘from everlasting to everlasting’ and His ‘years will not come to an end’ (Ps. 102.27). God exists ‘before’ created time, through created time, and will continue to exist without end. When it comes to explaining the nature of God’s eternality, however, as chapter one of this thesis showed, the biblical data are inconclusive. Whether because the biblical authors did not see fit to include a fully worked out conception of divine eternity or because (as Paul Helm and others have suggested) they simply lacked the ‘reflective context’ requisite for the formulation of such a doctrine, it is generally agreed that Scripture does not point explicitly or conclusively to any particular metaphysical conception of God’s relation to time. Those seeking to plumb the depths of this divine attribute therefore must consider, in addition to the biblical data, the import of philosophical theology.

With others I concurred that although the Scriptures contain no straightforward treatment of the metaphysical nature of God’s eternality, they do place constraints on the discussion. One reads throughout the Old and New Testaments that everything that is not God derives its existence from God; the universe in its entirety owes its existence to God. This doctrine of creation, which is central to Christian orthodoxy, insists on a clear and absolute ontological distinction between God and the created order (thereby distinguishing the Christian view of creation from both Pantheism and Panentheism). Historically most Christians, seeking to avoid either Pantheism or Panentheism, have concluded that God is outside creation. Conceiving of time as part of creation, this has been taken by most Christians to imply that He exists outside of time. Scripture also portrays God as acting within time: responding to our prayers; now delivering His people
from captivity in Egypt, now destroying Gomorrah; now this, now that. Christians also hold that God, having created the universe, also sustains it in existence. It must be granted that such portrayal lends *prima facie* weight to the temporalist conception of God.

After looking at these considerations, I presented, in detail, the two predominant conceptions of divine eternity: temporalism and atemporalism. The former affirms that, in virtue of His real relation to creation, God’s life has, experientially, a past, present, and future; God is ‘in’ time. The latter denies this, claiming instead that God exists ‘outside of’ or ‘beyond’ time; God’s life has no temporal duration whatsoever. As we saw these two conceptions are mutually exclusive: by definition, the one amounts to the denial of the other, primarily in virtue of their contradictory conceptions of time. Though I still think that this conclusion is correct, it is worth exploring further the mutual exclusivity of temporalism and atemporalism. For instance, although (as I showed) the two affirm contradictory conceptions of time which is sufficient to generate the conflict, are there any other areas of opposition? Such research, I believe, would further clarify the difference between these views, as well as further substantiate their mutual exclusivity. While I argued for a number of points in chapter one, it is worth emphasizing that one’s decision regarding the metaphysical nature of time is essential to one’s position on the nature of divine eternality.

I began chapter two by describing the assimilation of the concept of timeless existence from non-Christian philosophy (especially Platonism) into the Christian philosophical theological tradition, focusing primarily on the neo-Platonists Origen and Augustine. From there I showed, beginning with St. Augustine, that the atemporal
conception of God held sway over Christendom from the fourth century throughout the medieval period. Though neither the nature of time nor God’s relation to time were presenting issues for the Medievals, in tracing the development of the concepts of time and eternity from their introduction by Augustine into Christian thought, the substantial influence of Neo-Platonism is evident. The Neo-Platonist doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which each of God’s attributes is identical to the divine essence, and its attendant understanding of immutability appears to have provided sharp constraints on the Medievals’ understanding of God’s relation to time.

As we saw the locus classicus of the atemporal view came when Boethius codified the Neo-Platonist understanding in his definition of eternity: ‘Eternity is the whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life.’ By the turn of the thirteenth century, the Christianized Neo-Platonist conception of God’s eternity as the possession of successionless, unending, and perfectly existing life was well established. This tradition culminated in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, by which time God’s nature was equated with each of the divine attributes including eternity, so that God is not in eternity, nor does He have eternity; rather, He is eternity.

John Duns Scotus, however, introduced a significant objection to the consensus view of atemporalism by rejecting the prevailing conception of time as static and arguing instead for a dynamic understanding of time. Central to Scotus’ account of synchronic contingency is the denial that the future exists (or is real) in any sense. This, as we have seen, opened the door for the rejection of the atemporal view, which gained traction in the work of Ockham and Molina. The implication of this rejection is that ‘future things’ do not exist in the present, which further means they can neither coexist with God in
eternity nor exist eternally in the future. Regarding Neo-Platonism one implication of this chapter is that embracing the dynamic theory of time poses a serious threat to divine simplicity. An avenue of future research I think worthy of further examination is the plausibility of divine simplicity and whether if, in addition to the tensed nature of reality, there are other features of reality that conflict with the doctrine. This may, in fact, be the gateway to a large scale investigation into the plausibility of Neo-Platonism.

I next considered three each of contemporary proponents of atemporalism and temporalism. Like their Medieval predecessors, contemporary atemporalists—such as Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, and Paul Helm—are forced (at least implicitly) to affirm that all times and events exist on an ontological par. Contemporary temporalists—such as Richard Swinburne, William Hasker, and Nicholas Wolterstorff—on the other hand, follow the lead of Duns Scotus and attack the idea that all times and events exist on an ontological par. In this chapter I emphasized the emerging importance of the metaphysical nature of time into a key determining factor in the contemporary God and time debate. Further work on this topic could explain in greater detail why it is internally inconsistent to affirm both the dynamic theory of time and the atemporalist conception of divine eternity.

The historical survey of this chapter sets the stage for William Lane Craig’s proposed hybrid conception of divine eternity: accidental temporalism. Specifically, Craig’s proposal is an attempt both to avoid the difficulties that plague the atemporalist (viz., the static view of time) and temporalist (viz., positing an infinite past) views and to preserve the strengths of each: a timeless understanding of God sans time, a temporal understanding of God in relation to the temporal creation.
In chapter three I began my explication of Craig’s accidental temporalism by retracing how, through his research on the *kalām* cosmological argument, Craig came to recognize the impossibility of an actual infinite. Like the rooms in Hilbert’s Hotel, ‘if the series or sequence of changes in time is infinite, then these events considered collectively constitute an actual infinite.’ In particular it was argued that history just is the series of changes in time considered collectively, so the *kalām* argument implies that history cannot be actually infinite; time must have had a beginning at some point in the finite past. According to traditional Christian orthodoxy, however, God did not have a beginning. So for Craig the question of time and God’s relation to the beginning of time is a natural outgrowth of the doctrine of creation and the *kalām* cosmological argument. Although I agreed with this conclusion, the primary objections to this understanding of the *kalām* argument against an actual infinite were considered. While I contend that Craig’s conclusion stands, I think it is worth further exploring the implications of affirming the *kalām* argument (especially for alternative views such as Platonism).

In fact, taking his cue from Scotus and Ockham, it is precisely the question of the nature of time—indeed, the question of the temporal nature of the reality which God created and continually sustains in existence—that prompts Craig to reject the purely atemporal view of God held by most Medieval Christians. As we saw in chapter three, Craig regards the role of philosophy of time as a ‘fundamental watershed for our conception of divine eternity.’ Indeed, it is generally agreed amongst scholars that one’s beliefs about time impose constraints upon one’s view of God and time. Writing in terms of John McTaggart’s well-known distinction between the A- and B-theories of time, Craig defends the objectivity of tense as a feature of reality, which is the A-theory. In
other words, Craig affirms the objective reality of temporal becoming: the process of the occurring now of formerly future events, and the subsequent belonging to the past of these events. From this belief, coupled with his earlier conclusion that time must have begun at some point in the finite past, it follows that the actual world must include a state of affairs which consists of God existing alone without any creation.

Regarding the metaphysical nature of time, I adumbrated the philosophical and theological reasons Craig rejects the static view in favor of the dynamic view of time. While I think that these reasons are sufficient, in future research I think it is worth exploring whether there are additional reasons to reject the static theory of time. Specifically, (1) what are the ethical consequences of affirming the static theory for one’s theory of identity over time? On the static theory of time, all the times $t_1$ through $t_q$ at which I am real exist on an ontological par, which would seem to imply that ‘Keith at $t_1$’ is not numerically one and the same as ‘Keith at $t_q$’ because the former possesses a property (i.e., existence at $t_1$) that the latter lacks. If this is so—that is, if ‘Keith at $t_1$’ is not numerically one and the same as ‘Keith at $t_q$’—then on what grounds can ‘Keith at $t_q$’ be held morally responsible for actions committed by ‘Keith at $t_1$’? A similar line of inquiry could usefully be pursued concerning the unity of one’s consciousness on the static theory of time. Further, (2) what are the implications of this theory for free will? Is B-theoretic ontology compatible with the existence of human freedom? There are likewise theological reasons, for example (3) involving the Christian doctrine of

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Philosophers distinguish between two accounts of what it means for an object to maintain its identity through time: ‘endurantism’ holds that this means the object exists wholly and completely at different times, whereas ‘perdurantism’ holds that it is not possible for numerically one and the same object to exist completely at different times (cf., Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3d ed. [New York: Routledge, 2006], pp. 230ff). Some preliminary remarks on the implications of endurantism and perdurantism for God’s relation to time may be found in Ryan Mullin’s, ‘Time and the Everlasting God,’ *Pittsburg Theological Journal* 3 (2011-2012): 38-56.
redemption, to reject the static theory of time. Christians are committed to the claim that those whose sins are forgiven through a relationship with Jesus Christ, the redeemed, will be saved to spend eternity in heaven while the unredeemed will not be saved. If the static theory of time is correct, though, this commitment is far from clear. Consider: if ‘Keith at \( t_1 \)’ is not numerically one and the same as ‘Keith at \( t_q \)’ because the former possesses a property (i.e., existence at \( t_1 \)) that the latter lacks, then it is unclear how God could decide which ‘Keith’ to rapture: the ‘Keith at \( t_1 \)’ who is not redeemed and lost in sin, or the ‘Keith at \( t_q \)’ who is redeemed and forgiven for his sins. On the static theory both ‘Keiths’ are equally real, which would seem to render choosing to rapture one instead of the other wholly arbitrary. Thus it is worth exploring further whether the static theory is compatible Christian doctrines such as redemption.

I also showed in chapter three that considerations about the metaphysical nature of time give rise to what is, perhaps, the most surprising and oft overlooked feature of divine eternity: since time itself began at creation, there is no (temporal) before creation. This does not mean, of course, that God began to exist at creation (we have already rejected Panentheism). Given the state of affairs God existing alone sans the universe, if time itself began at creation, then God sans the universe must be timeless: there is no time to which God could be related.

Given that sans creation God exists in a state of timelessness, the question of whether He remains timeless or becomes temporal with the creation of the world is crucial. Due to God’s real relation to the temporal world and the divine knowledge of tensed facts, it was concluded that it is metaphysically impossible that God remain timeless. Thus God is timeless sans creation but temporal subsequent to the creation of
the temporal world, which view Craig calls ‘accidental temporalism.’ This conclusion entails that God undergoes change, which I articulated in terms of accidental (not essential) change within God’s non-essential properties. Such an explanation of course requires the wholesale rejection of divine simplicity, as well as any explanation of divine immutability that denies change of any sense in God (the incompatibility of this assertion with the Incarnation was explored in chapter five). But having denied such a sense of immutability, another avenue of further research could be a thoroughgoing consideration of divine immutability given accidental temporalism.

Having presented accidental temporalism and situated it within its historical context, I turned in chapter four to a consideration of the weightier objections to accidental temporalism that have been advanced from a purely analytical philosophical position. I began with two peremptory objections. In the first instance, William Hasker urged what I referred to as the ‘disturbed timelessness objection.’ As this objection has thus far gone unanswered in the professional literature, my handling of it is another original contribution of this thesis to academic knowledge. Hasker argued that accidental temporalism runs afoul of a dilemma: either God’s timeless phase does not cease, or if it does then there can be no state of affairs God is timeless sans creation. Both of these alternatives conflict with accidental temporalism. I argued that Hasker’s objection is motivated by a misreading of Craig. Once Craig’s articulation of God’s timeless phase is grasped properly, there is found no incoherence in the accidental temporalist’s claim that God’s timeless immobility is disturbed and God’s timeless mode does cease.

In the second instance I considered the objection that accidental temporalism boils down to the claim that God’s timeless phase is within time, which is unintelligible. Like
the disturbed timelessness objection, this ‘before-after incoherence’ objection has gone unanswered in the literature. My handling of it is therefore another original contribution of this thesis to academic knowledge. I have furthered the discussion by formally developing and analyzing the objection, ultimately arguing that it is unsound. This ‘before-after incoherence’ objection attempts to show that the relation between the proposed two phases of God’s life—timeless *sans* creation, temporal subsequent to creation—is not coherent. However, I showed that we can conceive of a relation between God’s timeless and temporal phases such that God’s timeless phase is not temporally before His temporal phase: the phases share a boundary relation, so that God’s timelessness *sans* creation bounds God’s temporality subsequent to creation. Moreover, it was shown that the objection rests upon a view of time that accommodates pre-creation time—that is, a view other than the relational view Craig holds. In the absence of good reasons for affirming pre-creation time, as well as compelling reasons to reject the most likely such contender—the so-called ‘unbounded’ view of time—the objection fails.

Though I am skeptical of their prospects for overturning my findings in this thesis, in future research I think it is worth exploring further (perhaps lesser known) conceptions of time that affirm pre-creation time.

I rounded up the discussion of chapter four by also considering two potential worries for accidental temporalism. It is notable that both the problems and solutions I offered in this section are original to this thesis, as well as to the broader God and time discussion, and therefore are original contributions of this thesis to academic knowledge. The first was the suggestion of an internal inconsistency: a robust doctrine of omniscience appears to threaten one of the cornerstones of accidental temporalism, the
A-theory of time. The central issue here is whether accidental temporalism can preserve the traditional understanding of omniscience—especially in light of Craig’s claim that at creation ‘myriad future-tense propositions suddenly switch truth-values.’ Again: both this objection and my development of accidental temporalism in response are original to this thesis. In response to this objection, I attempted to show that, given a proper understanding of A- and B-properties, even if B-properties do exist sans creation the fundamentality of A-properties to time is not undermined. This is because, sans creation, there simply is no temporal reality; B-properties alone cannot constitute a temporal reality. Thus God’s not knowing tensed truths sans creation is no threat to His omniscience.

My proffered solution, however, gave rise to one final objection: whether, in avoiding the dilemma, we rendered God’s omniscience sans creation vacuous. By way of response I showed that, given the radical doctrine of creation ex nihilo, God sans creation cannot possess knowledge of either A- or B-properties. But this is no threat to omniscience, for the meaning of ‘tenseless’ does not commit one to the actual existence of B-properties sans creation. I argued that God does not know, sans creation, tenseless truths of the sort The Allies land in Normandy on 6 June 1944, because there are, sans creation, no such truths to be known. In light of the radical doctrine of creation ex nihilo, then, it seems God’s knowledge sans creation must consist entirely of necessary truths and contingent knowledge. Besides observing that accidental temporalism stands up quite well to rigorous philosophical scrutiny, our discussion here raised interesting philosophical issues and occasioned a good deal of clarification—original to this thesis—of accidental temporalism. In particular, I showed that to claim God’s knowledge sans
creation must consist entirely of necessary truths and contingent knowledge naturally raises the question ‘what *is* the content of God’s knowledge, *sans* creation?’ After rejecting Open Theism as a viable option for the accidental temporalist who is committed to the biblical portrayal of God, I advanced middle knowledge as a tenable model of divine ideas *sans* creation. To my knowledge I am the first to argue (also in chapter four) for the dependence of accidental temporalism upon the doctrine of middle knowledge in order to preserve divine omniscience. I also examined the grounding objection (and its attendant truth-maker theory) to middle knowledge, but maintained this objection could be undercut by denying the standard understanding of truth-maker theory. Another avenue for further research would be the possibility of modifying or reformulating truth-maker theory and redeploying it—and with it a more robust grounding objection—against the middle knowledge theory.

As became clear in chapters three and four, Craig’s view departs from the mainstream of scholarship at several key points, especially: his endorsement of the A-theory of time, which puts him at odds with much of the philosophical theological tradition; his claim that the notion of timeless personhood is defensible, which the majority of contemporary philosophers deny; and his claim that God’s temporal mode changes at creation, which as I showed is the crux of most objections to accidental temporalism. At one level I find such objections to accidental temporalism compelling, although for the reasons I laid out in chapter four I ultimately find them wanting. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that there is force in such objections which should give one pause—indeed, the suggestion that God’s temporal mode changes runs contrary to the philosophical intuitions of many philosophers. Certainly there are weighty counter
arguments to Craig’s claims with which any accidental temporalist must continue to struggle. On such matters we in are deep philosophical waters and intuitions might not, at the end of the day, be our best guide; we must look to rational argumentation and weighing the costs and benefits of our mature theory.

Having examined (in chapter four) two objections to the effect that accidental temporalism is an incoherent position on God’s relation to time and concluding that neither is convincing, and having assuaged some potential worries involving divine omniscience, I concluded that no incoherence has been seen within accidental temporalism. In the fifth chapter I therefore proceeded on the assumption that accidental temporalism, as explicated and defended in chapters three and four, is plausible. I argued that accidental temporalism offers not only value in defending the coherence of Christian theism, but demonstrates terrific explanatory power and scope in furnishing coherent and plausible solutions to familiar doctrinal difficulties, as well.

I began with the atheist philosopher Nicholas Everitt’s objection to God’s existence on the grounds that the divine attributes—specifically, divine eternality—are logically incoherent. Everitt argues that both the purely atemporal understanding and the purely temporal understanding of divine eternality fail—which arguments, it was found, are compelling. It was further granted that, if indeed Everitt’s argument succeeded, then the traditional Christian conception of God contains a self-contradiction and such a God cannot exist. Everitt’s conclusion that God (at least as traditionally conceived) does not exist, however, was hasty. It was shown, as another original contribution of this thesis, that accidental temporalism neatly circumvents each of Everitt’s objections and preserves the coherence of the divine attributes.
Given that theories possessing greater explanatory power and scope are to be preferred, I also considered in the fifth chapter three doctrinal test cases: creation ex nihilo, the pre-existence of Christ, and the subordination of the Son to the Father. Scripture teaches and Christians traditionally affirm that God is the Creator of the universe. Christians generally understand this doctrine in terms of creation ex nihilo. As we have seen, there are two competing interpretations of this doctrine: the ontological dependence view, according to which all things are ontologically dependent upon God, (though it stops short of positing an absolute, temporal beginning to the universe’s existence) and the temporal origination view, according to which all things stand in ontological dependence upon God and God literally brought the universe into existence out of nothing whatsoever a finite time ago. The former entails the merely logical contingency of the universe, while the latter entails the metaphysical absence of the universe. It was seen that both the purely atemporal and the purely temporal views of divine eternality face certain difficulties in accommodating the preferable temporal origination understanding of creation ex nihilo. It was concluded that the Christian theist wishing to affirm the stronger interpretation of creation ex nihilo has as a plausible option the accidental temporalist model of divine eternity.

Christian theology holds that the Logos, the second Person of the Trinity, did not come into existence at the moment of Incarnation. Indeed, the personal pre-existence of the Logos, even if not explicitly spelled out in Scripture, seems strongly presupposed for an orthodox Christology. Three criteria must, on pain of an attenuated Christology, be met for an adequate expression of Christ’s pre-existence were offered: (1) the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, did not begin to exist; (2) the second person of the
Trinity, the Logos, assumed a human nature and became incarnate; and (3) qua incarnate, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, is both fully divine and fully human. As with the doctrine of creation there are two logically coherent schemes for understanding this pre-existence: the eternally incarnate view, held by atemporalists, and the temporally incarnate view, held by temporalists. It was argued, as another original contribution of this thesis, that only the ‘temporally incarnate’ understanding of the Incarnation, which accidental temporalism affirms, can accommodate all three Chalcedonian criteria. The ‘eternally incarnate’ view of atemporalists, though logically coherent, cannot satisfactorily explain the Scriptural and creedal portrayal of the Incarnation as an event and so results in an attenuated Christology. This is largely due, I argued, to an inadequate understanding of change. It might be fruitful as an avenue of future research to consider further implications of this account of change for Christian theology. Are any other Christian doctrines similarly jeopardized?

I next considered a touchstone of the Christian faith: the worship of God as a Holy Trinity. To my knowledge the discussion in this section of the Persons of the Trinity in light of the doctrine of divine eternity is another original contribution of this thesis to academic knowledge. In keeping with the Niceno-Constantinopolitan statement, theologians generally agree that the Son is of the same essence of the Father. There remains, however, considerable debate regarding the Son’s relation to the Father within the Godhead. Does the Son’s functional subordination to the Father within the economic Trinity reflect eternal truths within the immanent Trinity? Complementarians maintain that the functional subordination of the economic Trinity is reflective of an eternal reality within the immanent Trinity: the Son is voluntarily and lovingly eternally subordinate in
function to the Father. Following the Cappadocian Fathers, complementarians hold that the first person of the Trinity is *eternally* identified as the *hypostasis* of the unbegotten Father, and the second person of the Trinity is *eternally* identified as the *hypostasis* of the begotten Son. This position, I argued, is compatible with each of the purely atemporal, the purely temporal, and the accidental temporalist views.

Egalitarians, on the other hand, insist that the functional subordination of the Son to the Father within the economic Trinity is strictly confined to the economic Trinity. Far from reflecting any eternal reality within the immanent Trinity, the functional subordination within the economic Trinity is a voluntary and temporary arrangement between equals. I attempted to show that this view is compatible with neither the purely temporal nor the purely atemporal conceptions of divine eternality. This is because in the first case it does not seem possible for there to be a sufficient reason for God’s delaying for an infinite amount of time the decision as to which divine person would assume which economic role. Moreover, since on the purely atemporal view all moments are eternally co-existent with God, it follows that there is no time at which the divine persons are not economically related. This jeopardizes the distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity, implying that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father—which undermines egalitarianism. Thus egalitarianism is compatible with neither the purely temporal nor the purely atemporal models. Although accidental temporalism in no way demands the egalitarian view, in order to be coherent egalitarians must ought to something like accidental temporalism.

While I do think the conclusions of my discussion of divine eternity in relation to these three central Christian doctrines establishes the impressive explanatory power and
scope of accidental temporalism, another valuable avenue of future research would be exploring the implications of temporalism, atemporalism, and accidental temporalism for other Christian beliefs (such as the atonement, responding to the problem of evil, or the doctrine of original sin).\textsuperscript{77}

The thesis on God and time here developed has not been that schemas of divine eternity other than accidental temporalism are incoherent. My thesis does not demand—nor has it been my purpose to provide—a thorough critique of the competing accounts of divine eternity. As I mentioned in the introduction, doing so would be a colossal undertaking (Craig’s own comprehensive work on the subject is in excess of 1,600 pages!). Nevertheless, one implication of this thesis is that there seem to be formidable challenges to the traditional atemporal view as well as the purely temporal view. Enough has been said, I think, to warrant a careful and serious consideration of alternate views such as accidental temporalism.

I have thus drawn together the main conclusions of this thesis, along with a number of avenues for future research emerging from this thesis. Although the line I would likely take in pursuing these avenues may be evident, they deserve additional attention. Nevertheless, I believe I can safely say that I have substantially furthered the debate on the relatively ignored view of accidental temporalism. In doing theology, when it comes to matters whereof Scripture is silent or inconclusive, the philosophical theologian must perform his craft and offer his conclusions in a decidedly humble spirit.

thus submit that the findings of these chapters bear out my thesis: Craig’s model of accidental temporalism constitutes a philosophically robust understanding of God’s relation to time that is logically coherent, can hold its place despite the philosophical objections which have been raised against it, and is not only consistent with but sheds considerable light on key Christian doctrines. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is thus the Master of time who freely chose to enter into time through His real relations to the tensed creation. I submit that in defending the view that God is timeless sans creation, temporal subsequent to creation, I have shown that accidental temporalism as a model of divine eternality is plausible and deserving of serious consideration in the Christian theological community.
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