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The Scientific and Theological Superiority of Divine Timelessness

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Abstract:

For much of the history of the philosophy of religion it was generally accepted that God existed outside of time. Recently, however, many theologians have challenged the classical position that God exists outside of time and have instead argued for a temporal God. I argue that the concept of a temporal God is theologically and philosophically problematic, and in opposition to our best science. I first argue that a timeless existence is superior to that of a temporal existence, and that God as the most perfect being must therefore exist timelessly. I then argue a common objection raised against the idea of a timeless God, namely, the argument that a timeless God cannot relate to a temporal creation, is misguided and dependent on a scientifically dubious conception of time. I conclude by arguing that if one is to hold to the idea of a temporal God one must admit that God either had no reason to create when God chose to create or that God and creation have existed together co-eternally, and that this is problematic for the defender of divine temporality. I therefore conclude that a God that exists outside of time is superior both theologically/philosophically and better in line with our best scientific understanding of the world.

It is currently in vogue in theological circles to defend the position that God is “within” time, that is, that God experiences time in some manner that is similar to the way that you and I experience time. I refer to this position as divine temporality. Throughout this paper I use the arguments of William Lane Craig to represent the divine temporality position. Using Craig as the mouthpiece for divine temporality is

partly for simplicity's sake, but Craig is also the most prolific, and arguably most respected, defender of this position. Thus this seems to be a fair simplification. Craig, and other defenders of divine temporality, argue that divine temporality is both theologically superior to divine timelessness, the view that God is outside of time, and that divine temporality is compatible with our best science. I argue that both of these conclusions are false.

This paper is split into three sections, though before I jump into the three sections I provide a brief introduction to some of the key ideas covered in this paper, such as the A and B-series views of time. In the first section I argue that divine timelessness is theologically superior to divine temporality since divine timelessness ascribes a more perfect form of existence to God. Additionally, I argue that a timeless God is just as capable of interacting personally with creation, and that Craig's arguments against the ability of a timeless God to interact with creation otherwise rest upon an A-series view of time.

In the second section I argue that an A-series view of time is incompatible with our best science and thus ought to be rejected. Craig claims that the A-series can be reconciled with the special theory of relativity by appealing to a Lorentzian view of special relativity; I, however, I that there are good scientific reasons for rejecting a Lorentzian view of special relativity. Craig also attempts to argue that general relativity provides a way out for the defender of divine temporality, but, again, I argue that this claim is scientifically dubious and ultimately theologically

problematic. Craig's appeal to general relativity is theologically problematic because it ultimately subjects him to a well known critique Leibniz brought against Newton.

In the third and final section I present Leibniz's critique and argue that Craig's proposed solution is either straightforwardly contradictory or theologically unacceptable by Craig's own standards. Leibniz's critique is that if God exists within time, then God must either have had no reason for creation or God must be co-eternal with creation. Craig's position is that God is "timeless sans creation" and "temporal since creation." Though this is a clever attempt to avoid Leibniz's critique, I argue that it ultimately fails.

Thus, if I am successful, I show that, contrary to Craig's position, divine timelessness is theologically superior to divine temporality, and divine temporality is both scientifically and theologically unacceptable.

### **A Very Short Introduction to God and Time**

Defenders of divine timelessness and defenders of divine temporality can at least agree upon one thing: God is eternal. Disagreement arises once theologians try to understand what implications eternity has for the nature of God. The defender of divine timelessness argues that when we say that God is eternal, we are saying that God is, in some sense, outside of time. To make use of a popular analogy, imagine that all of time is a road, and that God is looking down on the road. God can see the entirety of the road at once; and the same is true of time. In this view God does not experience time but has eternally willed all divine actions; in fact, God can be understood (to the point that we can understand God) as one eternal divine action that brought everything into being and eternally sustains all things.<sup>1</sup> This view is often motivated by the claim that God, by definition, is the most perfect being, and thus experiences the fullness/entirety of divinity all at once.<sup>2</sup>

Divine temporality, alternatively, places God within time. In this view God is still eternal, God has no beginning and end, and still is omniscient and omnipotent, but God does experience the flow of time and the changes that time brings about in a manner that is similar to the way that we experience time. Most defenders of divine

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1. This could be read as stating that there is one moment in which God creates the universe, and then another moment in which God sustains the universe. If this were the case then God would be within time, since God would have experienced a temporal “before” and “after.” The correct interpretation, however, according to the defender of divine timelessness, is that God is causally and ontologically prior to the universe, but is not temporally prior to the universe, thus there is no temporal “before” and “after.”

2. This is the view famously argued for by Boethius

temporality will, however, point out that God has a perfect memory of the past and perfect knowledge of the future, and thus God's experience of time is superior to our experience of time. This view is generally motivated by worries that a God that exists outside of time appears impersonal, and thus is seemingly unable to respond to prayer or the sufferings/triumphs of God's people. A God that is located in time is at least, on the face of things, much more accessible, and much more involved in the lives of God's followers. Next I briefly explain the A and B-series views of time, and how they relate to divine temporality/timelessness.

The terms "A-series" and "B-series" first appear in a famous essay written by John McTaggart titled "The Unreality of Time." In his essay, McTaggart distinguishes between two ways of referring to things in time.<sup>3</sup> The first is merely to note the order of events using terms such as "earlier" and "later." For example, we can talk about my graduation from high school occurring after my 6th birthday but before my decision to major in philosophy as an undergraduate. This way of referring to things in time is what McTaggart calls "permanent." The label of permanent is applied because the order of past events will always remain fixed and, given that future events are determined, have always been fixed.<sup>4</sup> These permanent temporal indicators, earlier and later, are referred to as B-series facts about time.

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3. In the paper McTaggart actually discusses an A, B and C-series of time, but for the purposes of this paper we need only discuss the A and B-series.

4. J.M.E. McTaggart. "The Unreality of Time." In *Time* edited by Jonathan Westphal and Carl Levenson. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993. p.88

A-series facts about time include the familiar terms “past,” “present,” and “future.” The present is whatever one is currently experiencing, the past is whatever is before the present, and the future is whatever is after the present. A-series facts about time include B-series facts within them, since they refer to events being ordered, but add the terms past, present and future.<sup>5</sup> To picture the difference between A and B-series facts, visualize a number line containing only whole numbers. The number line itself represents B-series facts, since the numbers are ordered from least to greatest. One can then understand A-series facts by imagining that someone began naming the whole numbers starting at one, and we stated that whatever number was being named was present, whatever number was before the present number was past, and whatever number came after the present number was future.

Essentially everyone accepts that there are B-series facts about time. A-series facts, however, are controversial. The question is whether when I say, “I am now writing a paper” I am stating a true fact about the world. Put differently, if A-series facts are part of the fundamental nature of the universe, then there is a “flowing” or changing “now” that demarcates past and future. If an A-series is accepted as fundamental, then we must say that truth values about statements change. For example, it is true now that I am writing a paper, however in an hour when I go to bed that statement will be false. This is at least a *prima facie* contradiction, since one and

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5. *Ibid.*



the same statement is both true and false.<sup>6</sup> I will leave it to the A-theorists to show why this is not a contradiction. If only a B-series is true, however, there is no privileged “now” and no changing truth values. It is true that in 2012 I graduated college and that in 2013 I entered graduate school, and that has always been true. The question then is whether A-series facts actually exist (i.e. are ontologically real) or are merely a part of the phenomenology of our experience. The B-theorist will claim that, while we do experience the passage of time and A-series facts about time, A-series facts are not ontologically real but are rather an illusion produced by our psychological make-up.

There are multiply different ways of interpreting A-series facts. Craig adheres to a particular interpretation known as presentism, or as he calls it the “dynamic theory of time.”<sup>7</sup> A dynamic theory of time commits one to the existence of A and B-series facts. That is to say that, at a fundamental, ontological level, events are both earlier than and later than each other, and either past, present or future. Additionally, a dynamic theory of time claims that only those events that are present are “real.” Past events were real, and future events will become real, but only events that are present actually exist.

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6. *Ibid*, 103.

7. William Lane Craig “Timelessness and Omnitemporality” in *God and Time: Four Views* edited by Gregory Ganssle, pp. 129-160. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2001. p. 177.

Divine timelessness only requires that B-series facts be true about the world.<sup>8</sup> For, while events are fundamentally ordered, no moment in time is any more “real” than any other moment in time. All moments in time, or “nows,” are created and sustained by the eternal act that is God, and there is no reason to privilege one “now” over another “now.” If, though, God is within time, then time is not only ordered, but there is a real reason to privilege one “now” over another “now.” For, the “now” that God is experiencing is “real,” and all other “nows” or moments in time are either past or future. Thus, if God is within time, it follows naturally that time is, at a fundamental, ontological level, an A-series.

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8. There are prominent theologians who defend theories that place God outside of time and acknowledge the existence of A-series facts about the world, however for the sake of space and clarity I will not discuss these views in my paper.

## **Section I: The Case for Divine Timelessness**

In this second section I address two arguments. The first is an argument for divine timelessness, which I refer to as the “divine experience argument,” which argues that a timeless existence is superior to a temporal existence, and thus God must be timeless. The second argument, which I refer to as the relational argument, is one made by Craig which claims to show that if God is related to creation, then God must be temporal. The purpose of this section is to show that Craig’s only hope of responding to the first argument lies in the success of the relational argument, and that the relational argument ultimately fails.

### **The Superiority of Timelessness**

The divine experience argument is fairly straightforward:

1) God is the most perfect being and therefore has the most perfect type of existence [Or God is the source of being that possesses all perfections] 2) In a temporal existence the past and future are experientially unavailable 3) In a timeless existence all that exists is experienced “at once” in a “timeless moment”<sup>9</sup> 4) An existence that allows one to experience everything at once and avoids losing experiences to the past is superior to one that only experiences the present 5) Therefore, from 1 and 4, God is timeless.<sup>10</sup>

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9. As you can see here, our language is not very good at communicating timeless concepts.

10. An alternative version of this argument can be made that is based on the fullness of God’s being. It could instead argue that if God is in time, then parts of God’s being are no longer available to God, since God is only experiencing the present but is made up of a multitude of temporal parts. Thus if God is in time the whole of God’s being is not available to God, something that no theist would want to hold to. However this version of the argument would be highly reliant on a perdurantist view of temporal parts, so I find that the argument is stronger when it is couched in terms of experience.

This argument is one of the most common arguments for divine timelessness. It is promoted by theologians such as Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann,<sup>11</sup> Brian Leftow<sup>12</sup> and Paul Helm,<sup>13</sup> and was first presented by Thomas Aquinas.<sup>14</sup> The only really contentious premise is 4, since essentially all theologians agree on 1, and 2 and 3, which merely describe what it means to exist either temporally or timelessly.

What reasons then do we have to think that a timeless existence would be superior to a temporal existence? One reason is that as we experience our passage through time, we are losing more and more of our past. As we age there are an increasing number of experiences that are no longer available to us. Perhaps at times we consider this a good thing, if for example we are no longer experiencing something negative; however, it does imply that we lack the power to go back in time and experience anew those things that we experienced in the past. Thus we are subject to time.

What does it mean to say that we are subject to time? When I state that we, as humans, are subject to time, I mean that we necessarily undergo certain experiences, namely, we experience the passage of time. We undergo this experience whether we

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11. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Prophecy, Past Truth, and Eternity', *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), p. 395

12. Brian Leftow, "Timelessness and Divine Experience." *Sophia* 30 no.2-3 (1991): 43-53.

13. Ganssle, 29-30.

14. *Summa Theologica* Question 10 in *Summa of the Summa* edited by Peter Kreeft, pp. 107-110. San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1990.

desire to or not, and we have no power to alter time's effects on us. Time's effects on us include, but are not limited to, our loss of the past and our inevitable march into the future. Though we may greatly desire to hold on to a particularly pleasurable moment, it is not in our power to do so.

The fact that we are subject to time seems reasonable since we are finite, contingent creatures, however the same rationale cannot be applied when it comes to God. God is infinite and necessary,<sup>15</sup> so to think that God is subject to time's power is quite odd, to say the least. It is also troubling to think that God has an increasing number of experiences that are no longer available. This fact is troubling because, if God is in time, then as God moves through time all moments that are past are no longer available to God. These considerations lend a considerable amount of intuitive support to the idea that God is timeless, since nearly all theists will agree that God cannot be subject to anything else, including time, and many theists also agree that it is troubling to think that God is losing experiences as God moves through time.

Brian Leftow has an additional argument in support of the divine experience argument. Leftow argues that when we first experience something, that experience is a novelty and we gain some pleasure from that novel sensation associated with a new experience.<sup>16</sup> For us temporal creatures the novel sensation only occurs the first time

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15. The claim that God is necessary entails that God is not dependent on anything for existence. We, and the rest of creation are contingent, since we rely on God for our existence, however God is necessary because God accounts for God's own existence.

16. *Timeless and Divine Experience*, 50.

that we have a new experience, and after the first experience of something the pleasure from the novel sensation wears off to some degree each time we have the experience in the future. A timeless being, however, would not experience events in a succession as we do, but instead would experience all things at once. Thus, a timeless being would always have the pleasure of having a novel experience, since there are no subsequent iterations of experiences to dull the pleasure associated with novel experiences. And, given that an experience with more pleasure is better than one with less pleasure *ceteris paribus*, this argument concludes that God would be timeless rather than temporal due to the increased pleasure available in a timeless existence.

Though the divine experience argument may not appeal to everyone, many people throughout history have found it compelling. In fact, so does Craig. In each place that I have found where Craig addresses the divine experience argument, he ends his treatment of the argument by stating that the divine experience argument lends support to the divine timelessness position, but that divine temporality is overall still a superior position.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Craig has two general replies to the divine experience argument which he hopes makes the divine experience argument less appealing.

Craig's first reply is that there may be some advantages to a temporal existence, so a timeless existence is not as superior to temporal existence as one might think. Craig repeatedly (and exclusively) gives the example of music to

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17. Ganssle, 64; Time and Eternity, 74; On the Argument for Divine Timelessness from the Incompleteness of Temporal Life, 171.

illustrate this claim.<sup>18</sup> The basic idea is that if one is properly to experience music, one must experience it as flowing in succession from beginning to end. A timeless being would be unable to experience music in this manner, since it involves a succession of events, thus in at least one way a temporal existence seems superior to a timeless existence.

Craig's second reply is to point out that, while a temporal God would "lose" the past in a certain sense, a temporal God would have a perfect memory and the perfect ability to recall anything God had experienced. He states, "When we recall that God is perfectly omniscient and so forgets absolutely nothing of the past and knows everything about the future, then time's tooth is considerably dulled for Him."<sup>19</sup> The apparent conclusion of this reply, then, is that a temporal existence is much better for God than it is for us, and a timeless existence is not much better than a temporal existence.

It is difficult to know what to make of Craig's first reply, since he only briefly mentions it and only gives one example to illustrate his point. Though Craig does not discuss these, other possible examples of experiences that are superior for temporal beings are the pleasure associated with nostalgia and familiarity. For example, temporal beings can have the positive experience of nostalgia only because an experience occurred long ago and is now being recalled. Along the same lines, being familiar with something can be a positive experience, such as the re-watching of a

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18. On the Argument for Divine Timelessness from the Incompleteness of Temporal Life, 171

19. Time and Eternity, 72.

favorite movie or re-reading of a favorite book. Clearly both of these things, the experience of nostalgia and the experience of familiarity would be unavailable to a timeless being, since a timeless being experiences things all at once rather than in a sequence.<sup>20</sup> These two possibilities, and the example of music that Craig provides, do seem to show that there are certain advantages to a temporal existence, and may serve to cancel out the pleasure a timeless God could take in the novelty of new experiences.<sup>21</sup> Thus, I concede that Craig's first reply does serve to, at least somewhat, narrow the gap between the superiority of a timeless versus a temporal experience.

Craig's second reply, that God is omniscient and thus God's loss of the past is less damaging than our loss of the past, effectively serves as a corrective for all those who did not take into account God's divine attributes when they considered what a temporal divine existence would be like. Craig, however, never tries to argue that divine temporality is a superior existence to divine timelessness; rather, Craig argues that God's experience of time is superior to our experience of time. Therefore, after accepting Craig's reply, we are still left with the conclusion that a timeless existence is superior to a temporal existence. Though "time's tooth is dulled" it still has a bite to it, and God still loses any experiences that occur to the past. More importantly,

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20. It is not clear to me whether a temporal God could experience pleasure from nostalgia or familiarity either, however it seems at least possible that this could occur.

21. Though, without measuring hedons, it is difficult to say whether to pleasures are equal or unequal.



Craig does not address the troubling notion that a temporal God is, in some sense, subject to time, since God cannot go back in time and experience the past or move forward and experience the future. It is clear then, that even Craig would agree that a timeless existence is at least somewhat superior to a temporal existence.

Craig does not seem to appreciate fully the ramifications of the divine experience argument. For, given that the divine experience argument is valid and that Craig agrees with each of the premises, he must then accept the conclusion; and, in this case, the conclusion is that divine timelessness is true! Clearly Craig is committed to the opposite of this position, namely, divine temporality. Given this argument's validity, even soundness, how is Craig to maintain his commitment to divine temporality? The only option left available to Craig is to claim that divine timelessness is incompatible with some other divine attribute that is more important than God's possession of the best possible form of existence. Though Craig does not state this position explicitly, it seems to be the route that Craig takes to avoid a commitment to divine timelessness. The rest of this section will be devoted to exploring which divine attribute Craig values more highly than God's perfect existence.

Underlying many of Craig's arguments against divine timelessness is the idea that a timeless God is not a personal God. Craig's two main objections to divine timelessness both relate to the idea that a timeless God is not a personal God. Craig's first objection is that a timeless God would not be omniscient due to the fact that a

timeless God would not know any tensed facts.<sup>22</sup> Craig's second objection is that if God is to be meaningfully related to creation, then God must be temporal.<sup>23</sup>

In what follows I mainly address the second objection, since, I argue, the first objection is in essence merely the claim that a timeless God is not personal. This is because the defender of divine timelessness can fairly easily avoid the first criticism by appealing to a B-theory of time and therefore showing that there are in fact no tensed facts to be known.<sup>24</sup> This appeal neatly resolves the objection, however many still wonder whether God can be a personal God if God does not know anything regarding the temporality of creation. If it can be shown that a timeless God can meaningfully relate to creation, the worry associated with the first objection will be alleviated.

Craig's argument for the temporality of God based on God's being a personal God consists of only three premises and a conclusion:

- 1) God is creatively active in the temporal world
- 2) If God is creatively active in the temporal world, God is really related to the temporal world
- 3) If God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal
- 4) Therefore, God is temporal.<sup>25</sup>

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22. Ganssle, 146-153.

23. Time and Eternity, 88.

24. Tensed facts are A-series facts, such as "It is now noon," or "In the past I went to Disneyworld with my family." The consistent B-theorist, however, need not worry about tensed facts since, according to B-theory, the experience of time is merely a phenomenological illusion, not something true about the world.

25. Time and Eternity, 87.

Of the three premises, Craig thinks that the defender of divine timelessness must reject either 2 or 3. Thomas Aquinas, at least according to Craig, rejects the second premise, and claims that creation has a real relation to God, but that God does not have a real relation to the world.<sup>26</sup> This position means that God, according to Aquinas, did not experience either an intrinsic or extrinsic change when the world came to be, rather God remained wholly unchanged by creation.

Craig takes issue with Aquinas on several points, but since I will not be attempting to defend Aquinas' position in this paper, I will for the sake of argument agree with Craig that Aquinas' position is mistaken. Craig also puts forward and rejects two modern attempts<sup>27</sup> to get around his argument that take issue with his third premise. Again, for the sake of argument I will agree with Craig that those attempts have failed. How then can the defender of divine timelessness respond to Craig's argument?

Here I offer two replies. The first comes from Paul Helm. Helm states, "A mere extrinsic relation is not sufficient to do the trick (i.e. make God temporal). God certainly has a relation to the creation, but what does this show? It certainly does not show that God must be temporal any more than if I think about the number seven for five minutes then the number seven is temporal."<sup>28</sup> Here Helm is making the point that he, a temporal being, can bring about an extrinsic change in a timeless entity,

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26. Time and Eternity, 88.

27. The two modern attempts Craig addresses are formulated by Stump/Kretzmann and Brian Leftow.

28. Ganssle, 162.

namely the number seven, by thinking about it and yet the number seven remains timeless. Helm is challenging Craig's claim that if a timeless being were to undergo even an extrinsic change the formerly timeless being would become temporal.

Helm's reply seems sufficient to problematize significantly Craig's argument, however another reply is available to the defender of divine timelessness. This reply Craig himself recognizes, namely that Craig's argument is dependent on an A-series conception of time. For, if a B-series conception of time is true, then all of time exists as if on a timeline, and a timeless God could have eternally willed everything that takes place. Thus, if a B-series view of time is accurate, there is no reason to think that in order for God to be related to creation God must be in time. Craig's response to this is to state that a B-series view of time, "faces formidable philosophical and theological objections, not to mention the arguments that can be offered on behalf of a dynamic theory of time."<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere Craig argues that it is not capable to eliminate tense,<sup>30</sup> and that our phenomenological experience of past, present and future, among other things, demand that an A-series view of time is correct.<sup>31</sup> I will not address those arguments here; however, I do think there are some good reasons for thinking that Craig is mistaken, such as the contention that our experience of past, present and

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29. Ganssle, 164.

30. William Lane Craig, "On Truth Conditions of Tensed Sentence Types." *Synthese: An International Journal for Epistemology, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* 120.2 (1999): 265-270.

31. William Lane Craig, "Tensed Time and Our Differential Experience of the Past and Future" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37.4 (1999): 515-537.

future is weakly emergent.<sup>32</sup> I also will address in the next section why we have good scientific reasons for rejecting an A-series view of time. For the moment, then, I will merely note that for Craig's argument to go through and prove the existence of a temporal God, an A-series conception of time must represent reality, and we have good reasons not to accept an A-series view of time.

Let me briefly gesture at how a timeless God, given a B-series, could be related to the world, even though this point is not my main one. Again, if time is a B-series, and God is timeless, then God has eternally, unchangingly willed all things. Clearly then, God knows, and has always known, everything that is to occur. If this is true then how could God interact with creation personally--answer someone's prayer, for example? The short answer to this question provided by the defender of divine temporality is that God eternally was aware of the prayer, and has eternally willed a divine response to that prayer.<sup>33</sup>

This position may strike some as odd, since it may not appear that God is genuinely interacting with creation. I argue, however, that if this position is problematic for divine timelessness, divine temporality experiences a similar problem. For, while divine temporality can claim that God's response to a prayer

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32. This argument is presented by Berit Brogaard and Dimitria Gatzia in their paper "Time and Time Perception," *Topoi* 34.1 (2015): 257-263.

33. This in turn raises questions regarding free will that are beyond the scope of this paper, however hopefully it seems plausible that a timeless God can interact with creation. A good discussion of God's power and human freedom is provided by Herbert McCabe in his essay "Freedom" which can be found in the book *God Matters*.

occurs once the prayer is located in the past, defenders of divine temporality such as Craig also hold that God is omniscient and thus knows everything that will happen in the past, present and future. Given this, a temporal God also already knows that a prayer will be offered, and already knows what response will be given in response to that prayer,<sup>34</sup> and the only difference is that the temporal God produces divine action while being located in time, while a timeless God has eternally willed divine action from outside of time.

In conclusion, I argue that Craig cannot adequately deal with the divine experience argument, and is in trouble due to the fact that he appears to accept all of the premises of a valid argument that concludes that divine timelessness is true. Craig's way out of this difficult position seems to be to claim that a timeless God is not a personal God, and that God's status as a personal God is more important than God's possession of the highest form of existence. The relational argument that Craig presents to attempt to prove the point that a timeless God is not personal, however, requires that an A-series view of time is true. And, in the next section I argue that we have good scientific reasons for rejecting an A-series.

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34. There are some theologians who argue that God does not know the future for various reasons, however Craig is not one of them. And, while claiming that God does not know the future may solve some theological problems, it presents many more, such as whether God is actually omniscient and whether God can actually assure creation that evil will ultimately be defeated.



## Section II: Time Is On My Side

Many theologians are skeptical of divine timelessness for theological reasons. While I think that their objections can be adequately answered, responding to such objections will not be my purpose in this section. What defenders of divine temporality fail to address adequately is the fact that there are serious scientific problems for divine temporality, since it is committed to an A-series view of time. Thus in this section I lay out the scientific objections to divine temporality and argue that defenders of divine temporality do not have an adequate response to these objections.

According to the best scientific theory currently available concerning time, namely, the theory of relativity introduced by Einstein, there is no reason to think that, at the fundamental nature of reality, A-theory facts exist. According to the theory of special relativity, time is a dimension akin to the three spatial dimensions, and our experience of the passage of time is correlated to how quickly we are moving through the spatial dimensions. For those of us traveling rather slowly, and by slowly I mean significantly less than the speed of light, time proceeds forward “normally.” Once one begins to approach the speed of light, however, time “slows down” considerably. This phenomenon, known as time dilation, is well documented scientifically. The trouble here is that there is no reason to privilege any observer’s point of view, so we cannot say whose passage of time is “real” or “accurate.”<sup>35</sup>

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35. Presumably one could say “Well can’t we just agree that we can privilege the passage of time experienced by someone who is at rest?” This solution, however,



Hilary Putnam demonstrates how time dilation is a problem for the defender of the A-series view. He points out that, given special relativity, we cannot make sense of a privileged “now” that picks out what is real.<sup>36</sup> We are unable to privilege any particular now due to the time dilation that I discussed in the previous paragraph. I will attempt to illustrate his point. Imagine that there are two people walking parallel to one another at the same rate, and that the two people’s progress is being recorded on a graph with an x and y axis. In this case that the x-axis represents time and the y-axis represents the spatial dimensions. If the two people remain walking parallel to each other and at the same rate their x coordinates will remain the same at any given time, such that we could connect their x-coordinates with a vertical line (Figure A). If, however, one of the two people were to change direction or change speed a line connecting their x-coordinates would become diagonal to some degree (Figure B). In this illustration the line connecting the two people represents what the person is experiencing as “now.” If the two people remain moving at exactly the same rate in exactly the same direction then we can say that there is only one “now,” however once either person changes direction or speed we get two “nows” that are not in sync with one another. Once this happens what is “now” for one observer will

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does not work, since within special relativity we cannot say who is at rest and who is in motion. All motion is relative to some other observer (or potential observer), but we have no reason to privilege one observer’s point of view, thus we can never say definitely that one point of view is “at rest” and another is “in motion,” we can only say that relative to some observer I am either at rest or in motion.

36. Hilary Putnam. “Time and Physical Geometry.” In *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1, *Mathematics, Matter and Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

be future for the other observer, and since we have no reason to privilege one observers experience over the other, we cannot say which “now” is absolute. Therefore, there is no privileged “now,” and thus no privileged “now” flowing through time, which is what is required by an A-series view of time.<sup>37</sup>

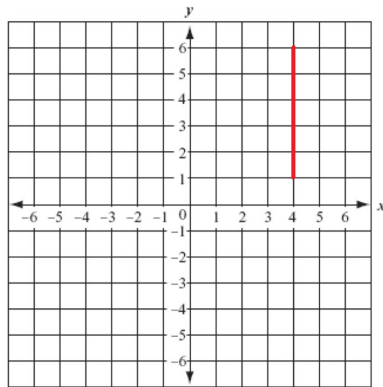


Figure A

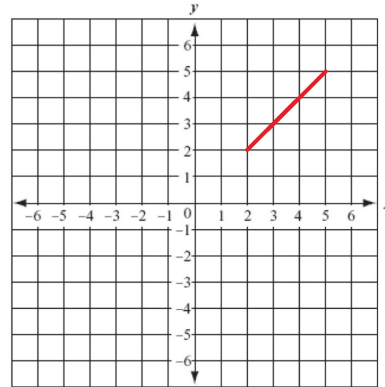


Figure B

Also included within the theory of relativity is the concept of reference frames. A reference frame is the point of view for any observer, and reference frames can be either inertial or non-inertial. Reference frames are considered inertial when they are going the same speed relative to one another. For example, when two cars are driving down the highway next to one another at the same speed, each car represents an inertial reference frame. Non-inertial reference frames occur when two reference frames are accelerating relative to one another. An example of this is when a rocket ship blasts off from Earth.

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37. Without a privileged “now” in time, there is merely a large number of inertial frames. This presents a problem for the defender of divine temporality, because they seemingly must claim either that God is in one or all inertial frames. As we shall see later in the paper, neither of these positions are desirable.

The idea of reference frames is not first presented in Einstein's theory of relativity, however Einstein was the first one to show that we have no reason to privilege one reference frame over another. Thus, in the example given regarding non-inertial reference frames, we can either think of the rocket ship as accelerating off of Earth and Earth being at rest, or we can picture Earth accelerating away from the rocket ship while the rocket ship is at rest. The math works either way. Prior to Einstein there was a postulated substance known as aether, which was absolutely at rest and permeated the entire universe. Using the aether, it was thought that one could determine whether something was absolutely at rest or absolutely in motion, for if you were at rest relative to the aether you were absolutely at rest and if you were in motion relative to the aether then you were in absolute motion. Einstein, however, showed that we had no reason to postulate an aether, and that we can only speak about things being in motion or at rest in a relative sense, that is, relative to other reference frames. Thus, since there exists no objective reference frame, we are unable to claim that any reference frame is in motion or at rest, and we are unable to privilege the experience of time in any reference frame.

I will now turn to Craig's attempt to show that divine temporality is a tenable position given the theory of special relativity (STR). Craig presents the argument facing the defender of divine temporality as follows:

- 1) STR is correct in its description of time.
- 2) If STR is correct in its description of time, then if God is temporal, He exists in either the time associated with a single inertial frame or the times associated with a plurality of inertial frames.
- 3) Therefore, if God is temporal, He exists in either the time associate with a single inertial frame or the times associated with a plurality of

inertial frames. 4) God does not exist in either the time associated with a single inertial frame or the times associated with a plurality of inertial frames. 5) Therefore, God is not temporal.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, Craig agrees with premises 2-4. He concedes that if STR accurately describes time, then God must exist in either one or a plurality of inertial frames, and that both of these options are unacceptable. The former threatens God's omniscience, and the latter seemingly either turns God's mind into that of a schizophrenic's or opens up the possibility for an odd brand of polytheism.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Craig argues, the if one is to successfully defend divine temporality one must deny that STR accurately describes time.

Craig presents two general arguments which attempt to show that STR does not accurately describe time. His first argument consists of advocating for a Lorentzian view of relativity, with the cosmic background radiation serving as a stand-in for aether. Here I will briefly outline what this entails.

Prior to Einstein's theory of relativity Hendrik Lorentz, a Dutch physicist, developed a similar theory, which was the basis for Einstein's theory. Lorentz's theory, in contrast with Einstein's, allowed for absolute simultaneity and absolute space by appealing to the presence of an "aether," which filled the whole universe, was completely at rest and served as the medium for light to travel through.<sup>40</sup> Though

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38. William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Press, 2001. p. 44.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, 54-57.

we now know that light does not require an “aether” to travel through, Craig argues that cosmic background radiation (CBR) can serve as a type of aether.

Briefly, CBR is an aftereffect of the Big Bang, and it manifests as microwave radiation that permeates the universe.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Craig argues, since there is something, namely CBR, that can serve as an objective inertial frame, we can make sense of the existence of absolute simultaneity/absolute time (i.e. an A-series view of time) if we adopt a Lorentzian interpretation of relativity. An A-series view of time is tenable due to the fact that we no longer need to rely on observers’ conflicting experiences of time in subjective reference frames; instead, we can appeal to, and privilege, the objective reference frame provided for us by the CBR.

There are at least two problems with Craig’s argument. The first is that it is not clear how the CBR could serve as a stand in for aether. The CBR, while being remarkably uniform throughout the universe, does exhibit some variation in energy throughout the universe, and is expanding throughout the universe.<sup>42</sup> Given that the CBR is not uniform and is in motion, it seems odd to claim that the CBR can serve as a substitute for aether, which was said to be absolutely uniform and motionless.

Additionally, and more importantly, Einsteinian special relativity has a significant theoretical edge over Lorentzian special relativity. That is, there are good scientific reasons for choosing Einsteinian special relativity over Lorentzian special relativity. In order to understand these reasons, however, we must first review the

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41. *Ibid*, 57.

42. <http://lambda.gsfc.nasa.gov/product/cobe/>

criteria for a good scientific theory. Though the scientific community is not entirely in agreement regarding what constitutes a good theory, two criteria that are widely agreed upon are simplicity and fruitfulness.<sup>43</sup> These are two of the criteria used to judge between theories that fit the scientific data equally well, or in other terms, are not falsified by the scientific data.

The criterion of simplicity simply states that as a theory requires more presuppositions to get off the ground, the theory becomes less appealing. It also includes the idea that a theory ought to proceed logically from its presuppositions, and not require ad hoc additions. Fruitfulness is a measure of whether a theory leads to additional discoveries and in general moves forward the scientific project of understanding the natural world. While fruitfulness is somewhat difficult to quantify, it is clear that certain scientific theories have led to great advancements in their field. One example of this is the Copernican revolution and the heliocentric model of the solar system it proposed, which ultimately led to the development of modern astronomy.

Based on the two criteria just discussed I argue that Einsteinian special relativity is vastly superior to Lorentzian special relativity. To demonstrate this superiority I appeal to Yuri Balashov and Michel Janssen's paper *Presentism and Relativity*. When Craig appeals to Lorentzian special relativity he has two options to choose from and both are problematic. Craig's first option is to adhere to a version of

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43. These are found in Thomas Kuhn's Essay "Objectivity, Value Judgment and Theory Choice" and are generally agreed to be among those qualities that a good scientific theory possesses.

Lorentzian special relativity developed by the physicist Adolf Grünbaum in the 1970s. In order to develop this theory Grünbaum simplified Lorentz's original theory and added to it the contraction hypothesis and the clock retardation hypothesis.<sup>44</sup> Grünbaum developed this as a “toy model”<sup>45</sup> in order to prove a point about Lorentzian relativity, however, Grünbaum never intended for the theory to be used as a serious alternative to Einsteinian special relativity.<sup>46</sup> And there is good reason for this reluctance, since not only does one need to add the contraction and clock retardation hypothesis to Lorentzian relativity to make it empirically accurate, the Einstein-Poincaré convention and Lorentz invariance must also be assumed.<sup>47</sup> These

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44. Very briefly, the contraction hypothesis states that when something is moving relative to an observer the object in motion will be shorter, and the clock retardation hypothesis accounts for the fact that a moving clocks time keeping is retarded when compared to the time measurement of a clock “at rest.”

45. A toy model in physics is a simplified model or theory used to either simplify equations or prove a theoretical point. Toy models are not thought to represent reality.

46. Yuri Balashov and Michel Janssen, "Presentism and Relativity." *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 54, no. 2 (2003): 341-342.

47. The Einstein-Poincaré convention deals with synchronizing clocks using light, and Lorentz invariance is the idea that “the laws of physics are invariant under a transformation between two coordinate frames moving at constant velocity with respect to each other.” Put a different way, Lorentz invariance states that if two inertial frames are moving in the same direction, at the same speed, the laws of physics work the same way in both frames of reference, as do any valid transformations of the laws of physics. (This explanation was obtained from an open course at the Missouri University of Science and Technology, the relevant information can be found here: [http://web.mst.edu/~hale/courses/Physics\\_357\\_457/Notes/Lecture.3.Relativity.Lorentz.Invariance/Lecture3.pdf](http://web.mst.edu/~hale/courses/Physics_357_457/Notes/Lecture.3.Relativity.Lorentz.Invariance/Lecture3.pdf))

additions to the “toy model” are extremely *ad hoc*, giving us good scientific reasons to prefer the Einsteinian interpretation of relativity.

Craig’s second option regarding Lorentzian relativity is to appeal to a neo-Lorentzian interpretation of relativity. The neo-Lorentzian interpretation is flawed because it assumes that space and time are equivalent dimensions,<sup>48</sup> and Lorentzian invariance is taken as a brute fact.<sup>49</sup> Lorentzian invariance is explained in Einsteinian special relativity by the fact that all physical laws have a “common origin,” namely the “space-time structure.”<sup>50</sup> Because two core aspects of neo-Lorentzian relativity theory remain unexplained, namely the equivalency of time and space and Lorentz invariance, the neo-Lorentzian interpretation has significantly less explanatory power than Einsteinian relativity.

Thus, in both cases Einsteinian relativity is scientifically preferable when compared to Lorentzian relativity. Both versions of Lorentzian relativity require additional assumptions and/or *ad hoc* additions that are not required in Einsteinian relativity. Additionally, Einsteinian relativity has been adopted by the vast majority of the scientific community, and it has contributed to many of the scientific advances that have occurred since the early 1900s when it was originally formulated. To emphasize the vast difference between an Einsteinian and Lorentzian view of relativity Balashov and Janssen state:

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48. Balashov and Janssen, 339-340.

49. *Ibid*, 342.

50. *Ibid*.



We claim ... that the argument from physics against Craig's metaphysically-motivated proposal is on a par with the argument against proposals to return to the days before Darwin in biology or the days before Copernicus in astronomy.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, Craig's first attempt to circumvent STR seems doomed to failure since there are weighty reasons for preferring the Einsteinian interpretation of relativity.

In Craig's second attempt to reject an STR interpretation of time, Craig appeals to the General Theory of Relativity (GTR), and a concept contained within GTR called cosmic time. Recall that within STR there are different reference frames based on the differing speeds of observers, and that there is no reason to privilege one reference frame over another. Thus, STR concludes that there is no absolute time, there is merely time as it is observed in different reference frames. Craig, however argues that this is a hasty conclusion, since STR only deals with bodies in uniform motion and thus is restricted to certain contexts.<sup>52</sup> Since we are looking for the nature of motion in all contexts, we should instead look at GTR, which is, per its name, more general and therefore applicable to the nature of time in the universe as a whole.

Once one is considering GTR something interesting results. GTR points out that we cannot distinguish between gravity and what we normally think of as acceleration, and then argues that instead of thinking of gravity in a traditional sense, we should think of gravity as the "acceleration of objects in space-time."<sup>53</sup> The consequences of this new way of looking at gravity are often illustrated by imagining

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51. *Ibid*, 330.

52. *Time and Eternity*, 57.

53. *Ibid*, 58.

the universe as a level sheet pulled taut. If we were to roll a ball across said sheet, the ball would roll in a straight line. If, however, before we rolled the ball across the sheet we placed objects of various weights on the sheet, the ball would be pulled towards the other objects on the sheet, since the other objects sitting on the sheet would create dips on the sheet.

In this example the ball rolling across the sheet represents some object with mass moving through space, for our purposes let's say it is a comet. The other objects on the sheet are other objects with mass such as planets and stars, the sheet represents the fabric of space-time and the dips the other objects create in the sheet are distortions of space-time. So, when the comet is moving through the universe, it is not "pulled" by gravity towards other objects, rather it is accelerated towards other massive objects due to the other object's distortion of space-time.

The preceding example was illustrating how things work according to GTR in a static universe. In an expanding universe such as ours, things get even stranger. In an expanding universe things such as galaxies are stationary, and space itself is expanding between the different galaxies.<sup>54</sup> The consequence of this is that observers in galaxies, such as us, are at rest and capable of determining a kind of absolute or cosmic time. Once he introduces the concept of cosmic time, Craig argues that a temporal God could exist in cosmic time. This position is not susceptible to the two problems encountered when we considered a temporal God in the light of STR. A

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54. *Ibid*, 62.

temporal God in cosmic time is certainly not at risk of devolving into polytheism or a schizophrenic mind, and also is seemingly not at risk of losing divine omniscience, since a temporal God in cosmic time exists in the preferred/privileged space-time.<sup>55</sup>

Here I will only briefly comment on the physics of GTR, since it is physics that is far beyond my ability to grapple with at anything other than an extremely superficial level. It should be noted, however, that the cosmic time that Craig wishes to make use of only appears in idealized GTR cosmological models, that is GTR cosmological models that are homogenous and isotropic.<sup>56</sup> And, while our universe appears homogenous on a cosmic scale, it is clearly the case that our universe is not actually homogenous due to the presence of galaxies and other clusters of matter. Also, while some may view the universe as being isotropic, Craig cannot view the universe as isotropic for the following reason: included within GTR is the idea that time and space are equivalent dimensions; however, as an A-theorist, Craig must hold that time is not isotropic, and instead state that the “direction of time is forward into the future, not backward into the past.”<sup>57</sup> Thus Craig’s attempt to make use of cosmic time in our actual universe is suspect, since cosmic time would not come about in our universe due to its heterogeneous nature. Additionally, cosmic time would not appear in the sort of universe argued for by Craig because of Craig’s commitment to an anisotropic universe.

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55. *Ibid*, 65.

56. Isotropic, at least when used in physics, is a term used to denote that a force is not changed based on which direction it travels. Balashov and Janssen, 342.

57. William Lane Craig, “Why is it Now?” *Ratio* 13, no. 2 (2000): 121.

Even given GTR and the existence of cosmic time, though, Craig is still in trouble. My objection is one that Craig anticipates, though I argue that he ultimately is unable to deal with it. After discussing GTR and arguing that a temporal God could exist in cosmic time Craig notes that defenders of divine timelessness may think that they now have a way around Craig's argument, since cosmic time had a beginning. Because cosmic time had a beginning, if God exists within cosmic time, it seems to follow that God had a beginning, and is therefore not eternal.<sup>58</sup> In reply, Craig states, "The Newtonian will be unfazed by this objection, however, for he may plausibly construe cosmic time as but an empirical measure of God's time since the moment of creation."<sup>59</sup> By this Craig means that the defender of divine temporality can avoid this objection, and the theologically catastrophic conclusion that God had a beginning, by claiming that the cosmic time contained within GTR is merely a measure of time that comes into existence when God creates the universe, and that prior to creation God existed within absolute time, a time that exists merely because of God's being.

I argue that this reply leaves Craig in a bind. Firstly, it is ontologically costly for Craig to posit the existence of absolute time based solely on his belief that God exists within time. While there is no way to disprove such a position, the fact that Craig must posit absolute time in order to make his theology work lends support to a position such as divine timelessness which has no need for such ontological excesses.

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58. *Time and Eternity*, 65.

59. *Ibid.*

However, even if Craig is granted his absolute time, Craig faces a problem: if God has existed eternally within absolute time, why did God choose to create when God chose to create? This critique was originally leveled at Newton by Leibniz. This critique puts the defender of divine temporality in a position where they must either claim that God did not have a good reason to create, which seems unreasonable, or that God and the universe are co-eternal, a position that is problematic for Craig in multiple ways. Addressing Leibniz's critique and presenting a positive argument for divine timelessness is the purpose of the next section. And, as we will see, Craig agrees that this is a serious problem for the defender of divine temporality.<sup>60</sup> Thus, if Craig wishes for God to exist within absolute time, he must provide a satisfactory solution to the critique just mentioned, and I argue in the next section that no such solution is available to him.

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60. "The question 'Why did God not create the world sooner?' is unanswerable given the infinitude of the past." William Lane Craig, "God and the Beginning of Time." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2001): 31.

### Section III: The Trouble with Divine Temporality

The philosophical/theological argument I bring against divine temporality comes from Leibniz's response to Newton's claim that God exists within absolute time.<sup>61</sup> By absolute time, Newton meant that time fundamentally consisted of the "flow" of a "now," or, in modern terms, Newton was arguing for the existence of an A-series. For Newton, there existed both a time and space that were independent of anything else, from which one could talk about the absolute passage of time (i.e. the flow of the "now") or absolute movement/rest. Leibniz, in his essay "Time is a Relation" challenges Newton's idea of absolute time by stating that if something such as absolute time existed it would either 1) be impossible to make sense of why God created when God chose to create or 2) demonstrate that God and the universe co-exist.<sup>62</sup>

Leibniz's challenge to Newton can be put into a trilemma. If God exists within absolute time, God either chose to create at no moments in time, some moments in time or all moments in time. Clearly the first of these options is not desirable, since the universe clearly exists and the theist maintains that God is the cause of the universe. The second is problematic because, as was stated previously, it is impossible to make sense out of why God would choose to create at a particular moment. One cannot make sense out of why God chose to create at a particular

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61. Yes, this is the Leibniz and Newton of calculus fame.

62. G.W. Leibniz, "Time is a Relation." In *Time*, edited by Jonathan Westphal and Carl Levenson, p.45. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

moment in absolute time because prior to creation there was no difference in content between any moments in absolute time, thus there would be no reason to choose one moment over another moment for the act of divine creation. Thus, if the second option is chosen, it must be admitted that God had no reason for choosing when to perform the act of creation. The final option, that God creates at all moments, leads to the conclusion that God and the universe are co-eternal, because if God exists in all moments and creates in all moments, God is never without creation.

Underlying Leibniz's critique are two presuppositions. The first is that God chose freely to create the world, and could have chosen otherwise. That God chose to create freely is nearly universally accepted among theists. The second presupposition is the principle of sufficient reason. This principle states that there must be a reason for everything, so in this case that there must be a reason for God to create the universe when God chose to create it.<sup>63</sup>

Craig's response to Leibniz's critique focuses on the second option, which states that God chose to create at some moments in time, so before I begin evaluating Craig's response, I turn to an evaluation of the third option available to the defender of divine temporality, namely, that God creates in all moments and thus is co-eternal

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63. Some may object to Leibniz's use of the principle of sufficient reason in this argument, however for my purposes I do not need to support a full fledged principle of sufficient reason, instead I could appeal to a divine principle of sufficient reason, which only claims that for any action God takes there must be a sufficient reason. This is presumably less controversial since God is, according to Christian theology, supremely rational and omniscient. For a modern defense of the principle of sufficient reason see *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* by Alexander Pruss.

with creation. I address this option here because some have viewed it as a theologically defensible option, yet I argue that it is not theologically defensible for Craig for at least two reasons.

The first reason is that Craig finds it theologically necessary that creation occurred temporally prior to God's continuing preservation of the universe. Craig claims that any position that is incapable of making a temporal distinction between creation and preservation is inadequate. When critiquing divine timelessness, Craig argues that if one accepts divine timelessness one must also accept an "emasculated doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*."<sup>64</sup> This inadequacy is due to the fact that, according to Craig, an account of creation based on divine timelessness entails that God is not temporally prior to creation, and thus creation is reduced to "the ontological dependence of the universe on God."<sup>65</sup> What Craig is concerned with here is the "ordinary language of the biblical authors," which describes God as existing "'before' the world began."<sup>66</sup> This criticism, however sounds rather odd coming from Craig, since when Craig attempts to save his own position from contradiction he claims that God is not temporally prior to the universe, but rather casually prior, as we will see

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64. *Ganssle*, 65.

65. *Ibid*. It is not clear that Craig is correct on this point, as Helm argues in response that according to divine timelessness it is possible for God to be eternally timeless and for the universe to have a first moment, however I will not at present take issue with Craig's statement (*Ganssle*, 84).

66. *Ibid*, 66.



shortly.<sup>67</sup> So, while some theologians are content to merely claim that God is ontologically prior to the universe, and that the universe is dependent on God but still co-eternal with God, this route is not available for Craig.

Additionally, Craig cannot accept that the universe and God are co-eternal since Craig subscribes to the Kalam cosmological argument.<sup>68</sup> Briefly, the Kalam cosmological argument states that: 1) the universe had a beginning 2) all things that have a beginning have a cause 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause. Craig finds this argument to be a compelling reason to believe in a creator, however, it obviously does not get off the ground if the universe and God are co-eternal. Thus, if Craig were to ascribe to the third option of the trilemma, and claim that God and the universe are co-eternal, he would lose access to a compelling argument for theism.

Given that the first option is not available to Craig, namely that God does not create in any moments, and the third option is not available to Craig, must he accept the second option and admit that God's decision to create was without reason? In his essay "Timelessness and Omnitemporality" Craig addresses this problem for the A-theorist. Craig formulates the argument as follows:

- 1) If the past is infinite, then at  $t$  God delayed creating until  $t+n$ .
- 2) If at  $t$  God delayed creating until  $t+n$ , then he must have had a good reason for doing so
- 3) If the past is infinite, God cannot have had a good reason for delaying at  $t$  creating until  $t+n$
- 4) Therefore if the past is infinite, God must have had a

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67. *Ibid*, 186.

68. Craig has written extensively on the Kalam cosmological argument, and in fact he wrote a book exclusively defending the argument titled "The Kalam Cosmological Argument," published by Macmillan in 1979.

good reason for delaying at  $t$  and God cannot have had a good reason for delaying at  $t$ . 5) Therefore the past is not infinite.<sup>69</sup>

Craig, and here I agree with him, takes the above argument to show that God could not have existed throughout an infinite amount of time and had a good reason to create at only some but not all moments, and thus the defender of divine temporality is seemingly in trouble. It seems that if one is to stick to divine temporality one must either deny that God is eternal, something no theologian wishes to do, or claim that God, the most perfect of all beings, does not have a good reason for performing a divine action, in this case the act of creation. Craig, however, thinks that he can find a solution to this problem.

Craig's solution, as I mentioned previously, is to argue that without the universe God was timeless, and that when God created God entered into time. If God is timeless prior to creation and temporal after creation Craig can seemingly bypass the trilemma while maintaining that God currently exists within time and that time is an A-series. Thus, if he is successful, Craig gets some of the benefits of divine timelessness, while at the same time he is able to claim that God exists within time.

I argue that Craig's response is fatally flawed, because it either commits him to a contradiction or, if Craig is successful in avoiding the contradiction, then Craig's position reduces to the third option out of the trilemma, namely that God creates at all moments in time.<sup>70</sup>

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69. *Timelessness and Omnitemporality*, 153-154.

70. Ganssle, 65.

First, I argue that Craig's position is contradictory. Though Craig works hard to avoid using temporal language, and thus avoid a contradiction, it is not clear that Craig's attempts to avoid contradiction are successful. For, as Paul Helm points out, if God's existence "outside" of time can be said to be before God's existence in time, then there is in fact no point where God is actually timeless.<sup>71</sup> Using Helm's critique we can derive a formal contradiction in Craig's view:

1) To be in time is to stand in real temporal relationships with events, such as "before" or "after" 2) God is "timeless" or "outside" of time before the creation of the universe, after which God enters into time 3) using (1) and (2) we can conclude that before creation God was "inside" time, since God was existing before an event, namely the creation of the universe 4) Therefore, God is both "timeless" or "outside" of time before creation from (2) **and** God was "inside" time before the creation of the universe from (3), which is clearly a contradiction

When Craig is confronted with contradiction, he seemingly backpedals and claims that God is "causally but not temporally prior to creation."<sup>72</sup> However, after stating that God is casually but not temporally prior to creation, and again denying that he affirms the argument outlined above, he states in closing, "My position is that God is timeless sans creation and temporal since creation."<sup>73</sup> Perhaps this closing statement does indeed avoid a contradiction, but it is not clear how. To better understand what Craig is up to a further analysis of his word usage is required, specifically the word "since."

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71. Ganssle, 163. This argument was first brought to my attention by William Bell.

72. *Ibid*, 186.

73. *Ibid*.

When Craig claims that God is temporal “since” creation, what does he mean?

In English the word since can be used in three different ways, either as an adverb, a preposition or as a conjunction. Both the adverbial and prepositional definitions of “since” include temporal language within the definition; as an adverb “since” is defined as “before now” and as a preposition “since” is defined as “between a past time and the present.” Thus, Craig must be using “since” as a conjunction, because the other two uses clearly commit Craig to temporal language and, as we have seen, a contradiction.

“Since” as a conjunction can mean “because,” and is used to link a cause and an effect. This is the only definition of since that does not obviously contain a reference to time, so it is the definition that Craig must intend when he uses the word “since.” In this case Craig’s statement that God is “temporal *since* creation” means that the act of creation causes God to become temporal.<sup>74</sup> Presumably then, as God creates, God creates time and simultaneously enters into time. This state of affairs, however, entails that creation has existed at every possible time, since the creation of the universe and the creation of time are simultaneous. Thus, it seems that Craig is committed to the third option of the trilemma, namely that God and the universe are co-eternal, and we have already seen that this position is one that Craig cannot hold.

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74. This position may also cause trouble for Craig, as it seems as though God is, in the sense discussed previously, subject to creation, since creation causes God to become temporal. And, God’s being subject to anything is problematic for theists.

Additionally, given the omniscience of God, there is good reason to think that prior to creation God is temporal, at least in Craig's view. This argument goes as follows:

1) God is omniscient 2) If God is omniscient then God knows all things, including the moment of creation 3) Thoughts in the mind of God are sufficient to bring about the existence of time, since they entail change 4) Prior to creation God is counting down to creation 5) If God is counting down to creation, then change is occurring in the thoughts of God 6) Therefore, since change is occurring in the thoughts of God, time exists and God is located within time

Craig is clearly committed to 1 and 2, and Craig explicitly states 3, namely that thoughts in the mind of God are sufficient to bring about time since they entail change.<sup>75</sup> Thus, seemingly the only premise that Craig can attack is the fourth, since 5 and 6 follow from the first four premises.

Perhaps Craig would wish to deny the fourth premise, but seemingly the only way to deny this premise is to maintain that, while God is aware of the impending act of creation, God chooses not to think about it. This is an odd claim, and it is not clear that, given the infinite mental capacities of God, it is possible for God to ignore pieces of information while maintaining omniscience. Thus, it seems that there is no good way out of the preceding argument for Craig, and Craig must admit that prior to creation God does in fact exist within time. And, if this is true, Craig's claim that God is "timeless sans creation" clearly commits him to a contradiction. Additionally, if it is true that God is in time prior to creation, Craig has made no progress, and instead finds himself committed to the second option of the trilemma, namely that God

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75. Time and Eternity, 66.

creates at some moments in time but not others, which in turn commits Craig to the position that God did not have a good reason for choosing a moment of creation.

Thus, Craig's attempt to avoid the trilemma fails. Since Craig wishes to defend the position that God is in time, Craig must choose which bullet he wishes to bite, either choosing to admit that God performed an action without reason or choosing to admit that God and the universe are co-eternal. And, since the first option is a violation of God's perfect reason, and the second is an option unavailable to Craig, I argue that divine temporality is theologically inadequate.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the arguments provided, I conclude that divine timelessness is superior to divine temporality both scientifically and theologically. In the first section I argue that divine timelessness ascribes a superior type of existence to God, and that a timeless God is capable of interacting in a personal way with creation. In the second section of this paper I argue that the view that God is in time, divine temporality, is flawed due to its reliance on a scientifically dubious view of time, namely an A-series view of time. An A-series is scientifically dubious because it goes against our best picture of reality, namely, the theory of relativity. In the third section I argue that divine temporality is either unable to make sense out of why God created when God chose to create or must accept what Craig refers to as an "emasculated doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*."

If all of my arguments in this paper go through, I have provided scientific, philosophical, and theological reasons for adhering to divine timelessness. At the least, however, I hope to have shown that divine temporality ought not to be the default position of the theologian, and that if one is to hold to divine temporality she/he needs to do some work to square that position with the best information we currently have available to us.

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