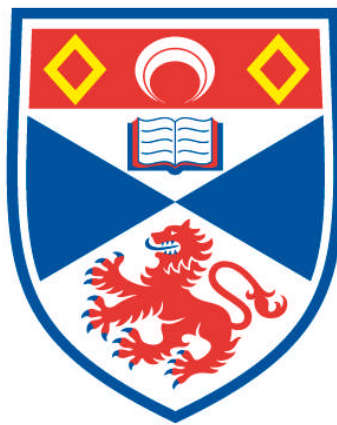


IN SEARCH OF A TIMELESS GOD

Ryan Mullins

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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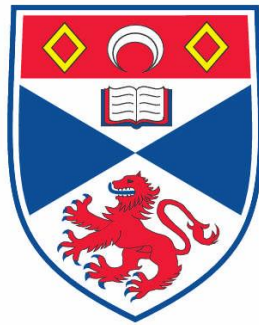
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In Search of a Timeless God

Ryan Mullins



This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
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Abstract: In contemporary discussions it is often assumed that God cannot be timeless if presentism is true, but that God can be timeless if four-dimensional eternalism is true. I argue that the Christian God cannot be timeless on either ontology of time. Contemporary atemporalists have not fully grasped the details of eternalism, nor fleshed out the implications of eternalism for understanding the Christian doctrines of creation, conservation, and incarnation. Once the details are developed, it can be shown that eternalism is not compatible with divine timelessness. Instead, the Christian God would be temporal as understood on eternalism. In order to demonstrate this, I shall do the following in this thesis. In chapter 1 I shall lay out the relevant desiderata and methods for assessing the doctrine of divine timelessness. Chapter 2 will give an up-to-date discussion of the philosophy of time, and lay out the theories that are needed to understand the doctrine of divine timelessness. Chapter 3 will articulate the traditional doctrine of divine timelessness and develop its systematic connections to the doctrines of divine immutability and simplicity. Chapter 4 shall argue that the classical Christian theologians were committed to presentism. It shall also argue that their commitment to presentism conflicts with their commitment to divine timelessness and omniscience. In chapter 5 I shall argue that classical Christian theology cannot reconcile divine timelessness with their doctrines of creation and conservation. In chapter 6, it will be shown how four-dimensional eternalism can help Christian theology solve some of these problems for divine timelessness. However, it will also be argued that four-dimensional eternalism conflicts with Christian theology, and that four-dimensional eternalism is not compatible with divine timelessness. Chapter 7 offers a thorough examination of the doctrine of the incarnation. It is argued that divine timelessness is not compatible with the incarnation.

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I, Ryan Mullins, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in [month, year] and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in September, 2010; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2010 and 2013.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: What is Time?

Chapter 3: What is Eternity?

Chapter 4: Presentism, Omniscience, and the Timeless God

Chapter 5: Presentism, Creation and the Timeless God

Chapter 6: Divine Timelessness and Four-Dimensionalism

Chapter 7: The Incarnation of the Timeless God

Conclusion

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a work on God's relationship to time. I have entitled it *In Search of a Timeless God* because that is precisely what I intend to do. Is there a way for the Christian God to be timeless? In order to answer this question several issues will need to be considered. Who is the Christian God? What are Christians committed to with regard to God's relationship with creation? What is time? What is eternity? How do the two relate to one another? All of these questions will be taken up throughout this thesis. What concerns us at this point is how one goes about assessing the answers to these questions. I propose that we can take the doctrine of divine timelessness as a research program and judge it accordingly. First, we will need to know what a research program is, and then we can start to discuss what will be involved in a Christian research program that promotes divine timelessness.

Research Programs

Within philosophy of science the concept of a *research program* has been of great importance in the past few decades. One element of research programs is that they are "maximal sets of methodological dispositions."¹ The basic idea is that a research program contains a set of theories about a particular facet of reality, a corresponding set of relevant data, and a set of methodological dispositions for assessing the data.² Each program will have a hardcore theory or set of theories that

¹ Michael C. Rea, *World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

² Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 52.

are not open to revision.³ It will also contain a set of auxiliary theories that are subject to revision and confirmation. The auxiliary theories can serve to confirm the hardcore theory. If a particular auxiliary theory continually lacks confirmation it can be discarded without necessitating that the whole research program be discarded.⁴ As such, it is possible to revise various aspects of one's program as new evidence comes along.

In order to begin rational inquiry into any subject one must already be working from a particular research program. This is because one cannot consider evidence prior to having methodological dispositions.⁵ It is not possible to weigh evidence unless one has some idea of what would count as evidence for or against a particular theory. In other words, evidence is useless apart from a research program.

The claim of contemporary philosophy of science is that all theories are underdetermined by the evidence.⁶ As such there can never be enough definitive evidence (100% proof) so that one could answer as to whether or not a particular research program is true or false. That is, of course, assuming the particular research program is logically coherent. Something that is logically incoherent cannot possibly be true.

Since logically coherent research programs are underdetermined by the evidence it can be difficult to know which research program one ought to adopt. Research programs can be either *progressive* or *degenerating*. In order to tell the difference between a progressive or degenerate research program one will need to be aware of several criteria. First, it will need to have internal coherence—the research program is not fraught with internal difficulties. Second, there is explanatory power—

³ Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 52.

⁴ Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 52.

⁵ Rea, *World Without Design*, 2.

⁶ Del Ratzsch, *Science and Its Limits: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 18-9.

the ability of a theory to explain the phenomena under consideration. Third, there is predictive power—the ability of a theory to continually and accurately make predictions as well as make testable claims. Fourth, epistemic fit—the plausibility of the theory with other beliefs we take to be true. Fifth, simplicity—a theory that has the least unnecessarily complex claims is more likely to be true.⁷

A progressive research program will be one that has greater internal coherence than any rival. It can explain all of the phenomena better than any other. Perhaps it can explain more things than its rival, or even be able to incorporate all of the claims of its rival. It will also have a greater predictive power than its rival. It will make the observed phenomena more likely to be true. Next, it will also have a better epistemic fit than any rival.

In some scenarios there are several competing progressive research programs that can account for a body of phenomena. In such cases each research program has great internal coherence, explanatory power, predictive power, and epistemic fit. When this occurs the criteria of simplicity comes into play. The hypothesis that has the least unnecessary complex claims is held to be more likely true than its rivals.

A Christian Research Program

Anyone wishing to examine God's relationship to time will need to have some basic Christian commitments in mind. The hardcore of any Christian research program will contain several hypotheses that are not revisable. The hardcore hypotheses cannot be given up if one wishes to continue working on a Christian research program. The following hypotheses are included in any Christian research

⁷ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapters 2-4.

program. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the hardcore commitments of Christian belief. Instead, this is a list of the relevant hardcore commitments.

(1) The triune God created the universe *ex nihilo* and continually sustains it in existence moment by moment. The entire universe depends for its existence on the will of God. At minimum, God providentially guides history towards its ultimate goal in some general mediated way. The ultimate goal of creation is the reconciliation of all things with God. (Col. 1:15-20) How God goes about providentially guiding history is going to be a part of one's auxiliary hypotheses, but the hardcore will contain the hypothesis that the triune God does act in some providential way.

(2) The hardcore will also include the claim that God is directly involved in history through personal revelatory acts. As Bruce Ware explains, "Distinctive of the biblical witness of God as over and against both Near Eastern and Greek conceptions is this fundamental conviction that the one and only true God has involved himself personally at every level of his created order."⁸ Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen concur.

[T]he God of the opening chapters of Genesis is portrayed as a relational God. Most basically, God is present and active in the world, enters into a relationship of integrity with the world, and does so in such a way that both world and God are affected by that interaction. God has chosen not to remain aloof from the creation but to get caught up with the creatures in moving towards the divine purposes for the world.⁹

How one understands God's involvement in history and divine action will be a part of one's auxiliary hypotheses. These acts could be understood as interventions or violations of the laws of nature. Or they could be understood in a non-interventionist

⁸ Bruce Ware, "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," in ed. Bruce Ware, *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 81.

⁹ Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 42.

way.¹⁰ Either way, the Christian is committed to the claim that God acts in special ways in history. For instance, God brought about the exodus of the Israelites. This story involves God acting in special ways at specific times, and any Christian research program will need to be able to account for this epoch of history and many others like it.

(3) The hardcore of any Christian research program will also include an account of covenants. The God of the Bible is a God who freely establishes covenants with human persons. God was under no obligation to enter into a covenant with Abram, but freely established a covenant with Abram. In so doing God took on a set of obligations. He made promises to Abram and his descendants. God promised to bless the entire world through Abram's descendants. There are various ways to understand the covenants, and there are debates about whether or not certain covenants are conditional, unconditional, everlasting, or temporally limited. These will be a part of the auxiliary hypotheses, but a commitment to a covenantal God is a hardcore hypothesis.

(4) Another hardcore hypothesis is the doctrine of the Incarnation. The second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, became incarnate at a particular point in history. I admit that the phrase "became incarnate" is question begging. It sounds as if there is an earlier state of affairs where God is not incarnate, and then a temporally later state of affairs where God is incarnate.¹¹ As such, God cannot possibly be timeless since He has temporal moments in His life. It would be better to state the doctrine of the

¹⁰ Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, chapter 5. Murphy, "Divine Action in the Natural Order: Buridan's Ass and Schrodinger's Cat," in eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Notre Dame: Vatican Press, 1995). Also, Robert John Russell, "Quantum Physics and the Theology of Non-Interventionist Objective Divine Action," in eds. Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹¹ In fact this is often how the Patristic Fathers explain the incarnation and the Son's pre-existence. One example is found in Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 9.6. "There is a distinction between the three states: God, before his human life; then God-and-man; and thereafter wholly God and wholly man."

incarnation in a way that doesn't automatically favor divine temporality. Whether or not this is possible will be taken up in chapter 7. For now it is sufficient to point out that any Christian research program will include the doctrine of the incarnation. There are various models of the incarnation that will make up part of the auxiliary hypotheses. For instance, one might hold to a three-part composite Christology. This is where the incarnation involves the second divine Person assuming a human soul and body. Perhaps one might add that Christ had a divine will and a human will. Someone else might deny that Christ had two wills, or even that Christ had two minds and argue that such a view looks like Nestorianism.¹² Instead they will posit that God the Son took on a human body and limited the exercise of His powers such that He constitutes a human person. Either way, the hardcore will include a doctrine of the incarnation.

The incarnation will have several entailments for the hardcore. First, the incarnation reaffirms what God declared at the beginning of creation: it is very good. The material world is not inherently evil or deficient. Second, creation can and does reveal the divine nature. It is not as if the world is inherently diametrically opposed to the very being of God. Third, God can and does reveal Himself in history, in time. Time is not diametrically opposed to the very being of God either.

(5) A doctrine of the Holy Spirit will also be included. Like everything else there are many ways to spell out the economic role of the Holy Spirit. A minimal claim will include something about the Holy Spirit being poured out on all flesh (Acts 2), or that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Rom 5:5) The Holy Spirit is actively working in the lives of every person in order to bring about the reconciliation of all things to God. The Holy Spirit cannot act in someone's

¹² Colin Gunton, *Being and Act: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 29.

life until she exists. Once she exists the Holy Spirit will work in particular ways in her life to bring her to salvation and everlasting joy. Any Christian research program must be able to account for this.

(6) The Christian hardcore must include an adequate account of religious language. The God of the Bible is a God who reveals Himself to us. He is a God who wants us to know Him intimately. He calls us to pray to Him, worship Him, and interact with Him. This entails being able to stand in real relations with God and being able to accurately refer to God. It does not mean that we will fully comprehend God, but it does mean that we can have some knowledge of God. The divine act of revelation through prophets and ultimately through Christ entails that we can have knowledge of God. If we could not have any knowledge of God, it would be useless for God to try to reveal Himself to us. It would leave us saying, “Jesus, I know you are supposed to be the exact representation of God, the fullness of deity and all that, *but...*” The ‘but’ here is intolerable to the gospel.

This entails that the doctrine of ineffability is false. Some might see this as a departure from the Christian tradition, but I see it as a happy departure, something worth celebrating. In my opinion no theologian actually believes in the doctrine of ineffability. It is something that Christian theologians may pay lip service to, but it is not something one can actually believe. There are two reasons for thinking this to be true. The first is due in part to the fact that the doctrine is self-referentially incoherent. It cannot even be stated in a meaningful way.¹³ It is an ill judged metaphysical compliment given to God. It is a misplaced piety that attempts to express the transcendence of God by noting the limits of human language and reason, but

¹³ John Hick, “Ineffability,” *Religious Studies* 36, 2000. Keith Yandell, “The Ineffability Theme,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4 (1975). Also, Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter 3.

ultimately lands in nonsense.¹⁴ One can easily maintain the limits of human reason and language to capture God without holding to something that is self-contradictory like ineffability. Augustine's attempt is as good as any other to state the doctrine, and he is forced to admit that it entails a contradiction.

[I]f I have said anything [about God], it is not what I desired to say. How do I know this, except from the fact that God is unspeakable? But what I have said, if it had been unspeakable, could not have been spoken. And so God is not even to be called "unspeakable," because to say even this is to speak of Him. Thus there arises a curious contradiction of words, because if the unspeakable is what cannot be spoken of, it is not unspeakable if it can be called unspeakable. And this opposition of words is rather to be avoided by silence than to be explained away by speech. And yet God, although nothing worthy of His greatness can be said of Him, has condescended to accept the worship of men's mouths, and has desired us through the medium of our own words to rejoice in His praise.¹⁵

If one notes that a position entails a contradiction, she cannot rationally hold it. I do not have in mind apparent contradictions like light sometimes acting like a particle and other times acting like a wave. What I have in mind is strict contradiction like *speakable* or *unspeakable*. No one can actually believe this.

The second reason to think that no one actually believes in the doctrine of ineffability is derived from the simple fact that every major Christian theologian has completely ignored it in practice. Augustine, John of Damascus, and Pseudo-Dionysius are three great examples of people who pay lip service to ineffability, and then go on to write large treatises on the divine nature. If they really thought that God was ineffable, they would not continue to speak about what God is like at such great lengths. Nor would they so staunchly defend the doctrine of the Trinity if God were truly ineffable.

An adequate account of religious language will include being able to make determinate claims about God. This does not exclude making indeterminate claims

¹⁴ As Colin Gunton puts it, "what might appear to be a proper human modesty before the divine can turn into the supreme blasphemy of denying revelation." *Being and Act*, 36.

¹⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I.6.

about God, nor does it exclude using metaphor, analogy, simile, hyperbole, and all of the great riches of human language to talk about God.¹⁶

Everything that exists has at least one property that is essential to it. Some properties are *determinate properties* while others are *indeterminate*.¹⁷ Determinate properties are very precise descriptions of what the subject is. For instance *weighing 8 pounds* is a determinate property of a particular bowling ball. Indeterminate properties are more vague descriptions of a subject that are dependent upon determinate properties. A bowling ball that weighs 8 pounds will have several indeterminate properties such as *having weight*, *having mass*, and *being spatially located*. According to Keith Yandell, “[o]ne cannot have an indeterminate concept without also having some more determinate concept that falls under it.”¹⁸ One could not know that a bowling ball has weight without knowing that it has spatial extension.

No concept or property is an island. Properties get their meaning from a community or group of related concepts and properties.¹⁹ Some sets of properties simply go hand in hand. For instance, *being spatially located* typically goes hand in hand with *being a physical object*. Also, *being a husband* typically goes along with *being married*. Every subject has a *property scope*, or a range of applicable properties.²⁰ Certain items cannot properly be predicated with particular properties. A husband cannot have the property *wife* because of the type of thing a husband is. A car cannot possess the property *a prime number* because a car just is not that sort of thing. The number 12 cannot look like you because you—assuming you are a human person—have a different property scope than the number 12. However,

¹⁶ David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), chapter 12.

¹⁷ Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 86.

¹⁸ Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 87.

¹⁹ Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 67.

²⁰ Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 78-85.

metaphysicians will disagree on some of these points. Some deny the existence of negative properties like *not a number*. Others see negative, or sometimes called artificial properties, as perfectly legitimate. It is hard to tell because certain properties seem perfectly appropriate. It seems appropriate to predicate of the number 12 *non-personal* and *non-conscious* because numbers are neither of those things. The reason this seems appropriate is because of the determinate properties of numbers seem to entail these more indeterminate properties.

With regard to religious language a proper Christian account will include all of this. For instance, the Christian must be able to say that God is triune. To say that God is triune is a determinate description of God. A Christian will also need to be able to say that God is the Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. If a research program cannot accommodate such things, it cannot be considered Christian.

How one goes about articulating religious language will vary, but the end goal is to have a determinate description of the God who created us, sustains us, and redeems us. One might hold to the *via triplex*. This is the method used by Pseudo-Dionysius in the *Divine Names* and it involves a three step process in order to make determinate claims about God.²¹ The first step in the *via triplex* is the *via positive*. At this step one looks for a perfection or communicable attribute that God and creatures have in common like *goodness*. We thus positively predicate it of God by saying that “God is good.” Yet, say Dionysian thinkers, God is not good in the same way that we are good for we participate in goodness, and surely God does not participate in goodness (i.e. His goodness does not depend on something external to Himself). Thus, in the second step we remove a particular understanding of goodness from God—i.e. participated goodness. I say “remove” and not “negate” because Pseudo-Dionysius

²¹ Pseudo-Dionysius’ method is often abused and misused in certain circles within contemporary theology. See Timothy Knepper, “Three Misuses of Dionysius for Comparative Theology,” *Religious Studies* 45 (2009).

typically uses *aphaeresis* which means “removal” instead of *apophasis* which means “negation.”²² So the second step, the *via negativa*, contrasts the way God and creatures have various properties without denying the predicates *simpliciter* of God. Which brings us to the third step: the *via causalitatis*. At this step a Dionysian will affirm that God has goodness in some superabundant way because He is the cause or source of all goodness. This brings us to a determinate claim about God, but it is not the only way to develop an account of religious language.

Many thinkers prior and posterior to the late Middle Ages held to a doctrine of univocity. This is where predicates like *good* and *being* are said of God and creatures in the same sense. Others will follow Thomas Aquinas and hold that *good* is being used in an analogical sense. This is where *good* when predicated of God and creatures has a similar and relevant sense, but the predicate is not used univocally.²³ Which theory one holds will be part of her auxiliary hypotheses, but an account of religious language that gives determinate descriptions of God will be a part of the hardcore of any Christian research program.

(7) Finally, any Christian research program will hold that God cannot create a world that is fundamentally at odds with who He is. God cannot actualize a state of affairs that are not compossible. For instance, when one is working on a theodicy she will argue that God cannot create a world where evil has the ultimate say. God is necessarily perfectly good. He cannot create a world that is on the whole evil because this would be at odds with who God is. Scripture seems quite clear on this point. The

²² Knepper, “Three Misuses of Dionysius for Comparative Theology,” 209.

²³ See E. Jennifer Ashwort, “Medieval Theories of Analogy,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/analogy-medieval/#6>. Also, Katherin Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 17. William E. Mann, “Duns Scotus on Natural and Supernatural Knowledge of God,” in ed. Thomas Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Clark, *To Know and Love God*, chapter 12.

Bible portrays a God who is radically confronting evil and promises to rid the world of evil.²⁴

With regard to the topic of this thesis, what must be understood is that the Christian God has created the temporal universe with the intent of having an intimate loving relationship with His temporal creatures. He has created a universe that He can interact with. If a particular research program cannot account for God's actions in creation, it cannot be considered a Christian research program.

The Divine Timeless Research Program

Now that we have the generic hardcore Christian research program on the table it is time to look at the particular research program under consideration. The defender of divine timelessness will have to include all of the above in her hardcore, but she will also include the following three hypotheses in her hardcore: divine timelessness, simplicity, and strong immutability. These doctrines will be examined at length in later chapters. For now I will offer a brief definition of each. To say that God is timeless is to say that He exists without beginning, without end, without succession or moments in His life, and without temporal extension or location. Divine simplicity is the thesis that God lacks all physical and metaphysical composition. God has no parts or diversity in His essence. A strong doctrine of immutability will need to be able to prevent God from undergoing any kind of change. Otherwise, God would not be timeless. Typically this is taken to be that God cannot change with regard to intrinsic and extrinsic properties. Of course, strictly speaking, a simple God has no properties.

²⁴ See N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

These are the hardcore hypotheses of this research program. These hypotheses are not open to revision. If one were to revise any of these hypotheses she would be adopting a new research program. This is the research program that I shall examine in this thesis. However, this research program can have several different sets of auxiliary hypotheses. As such, I shall need to examine these variations as well. What are the auxiliary hypotheses that need to be examined? There are three that I shall primarily focus on in this thesis.

To start, one will need a theory of time. What is time? This question will be taken up in the next chapter. For now a few preliminary remarks are in order. There are several theories of time that the defender of divine timelessness can adopt. As we shall see later, several Christian thinkers argue that certain theories of time are incompatible with divine timelessness. A successful research program will hold to a theory of time that is compatible with the hardcore of divine timelessness. A sure and quick way to have an unsuccessful research program is to fail to articulate a theory of time. Throughout this thesis I shall be interacting with a diverse group of Christian thinkers. My dialogue partners do not exhaust the number of people who have weighed in on this topic. I do, however, think that the dialogue partners I have chosen are the best representatives of divine timelessness. I have intentionally excluded from dialogue various thinkers who have weighed in on this topic because they have failed, and in some instances refused, to articulate a theory of time. One of my working assumptions is this: no research program that seeks to explain God's relation to time can even hope to be successful without articulating a coherent theory of time.²⁵

²⁵ I should also note that I am intentionally excluding from dialogue theologians who have articulated incoherent theories of time. It is not hard to find theologians who offer theories of time whilst demonstrating ignorance of the fundamental issues within the philosophy of time. This can be done by making vague appeals to relativity theory, or perhaps musical theory. It could be done by defining time as the relation to the Other, where 'Other' is eternity. This just completely fails to define

The second relevant auxiliary hypothesis is divine action. This has been a difficult issue for defenders of divine timelessness in the past. Part of the hardcore is that God acts in time in various ways. It seems that if God acts in time, He must be temporal. What is needed is a model of divine action where a timeless God can interact with a temporal creation. This is a tall order.

The third relevant auxiliary hypothesis that I shall examine in this thesis is the incarnation. There are various models of the incarnation, so perhaps there is a model where a timeless God can be incarnate. This would involve the humanity of the Son having temporality, whilst the divinity of the Son remains atemporal.

Testing the Research Program

There are two basic ways to test the divine timeless research program. The first is the test of internal coherence. This involves examining how the hardcore and auxiliary hypotheses fit together. If they do not fit together, it is not a successful research program. For instance, if a version of divine timelessness entails that God cannot be the creator of the world, become incarnate, or that human persons cannot refer to God at all, it is unsuccessful. A successful research program must be internally coherent to even be considered a viable contender.

If a research program can pass the first test it can move on to the second test. The second test involves examining arguments and evidence for and against it. This will involve looking at arguments for divine timelessness—are there any good reasons to think that God is timeless? The second test will also involve examining the evidence for the auxiliary hypotheses. It is the contention of many today that divine timelessness is only compatible with a theory of time called four-dimensional

what time in fact is. Others attempt to offer a “Trinitarian” approach to time which typically results in a conceptual nightmare; part of the nightmare being a complete failure to define time.

eternalism. A common strategy amongst divine temporalists is to argue that four-dimensional eternalism is false. Since divine timelessness needs four-dimensionalism, it falls with four-dimensionalism. A successful Christian research program committed to divine timelessness will need to offer reasons for thinking that God is timeless, as well as defend the truth of her particular theory of time.

My strategy throughout this thesis is to see if the divine timeless research program can pass the first test. I shall examine the internal coherence of various models and argue that divine timelessness is not compatible with a presentist ontology of time. Unlike other temporalists, I shall also argue that four-dimensionalism is not compatible with divine timelessness. The main thrust of this thesis is that there are no successful Christian research programs that promote divine timelessness because divine timelessness is not compatible with any existent theory of time. Perhaps others will be forthcoming as discussions within the philosophy of time progress, but as of now the prospects for divine timelessness look bleak with regard to internal coherence.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS TIME?

Among these we have just cause to account TIME; since if we keep to the popular and familiar use of the word, nothing can be more easily understood: but if we range abroad to those vast Wildernesses, the Dialectical Paraphrases of Philosophers thereupon, and hunt after an adequate *Definition*, beating its peculiar *Genus*, and essential *Difference*; nothing can be more obscure and controversial.

—Pierre Gassendi²⁶

In this chapter the focus of the discussion shall be on the metaphysics of time. There are multiple issues and theories that must be put on the table and sorted out in order to properly deal with the question of God’s relation to time. However, I must first defend my approach. Some contemporary theologians and philosophers will question whether or not it is appropriate to start a discussion on God’s relation to time with an examination on the nature of time. Thinkers like Katherin Rogers and T.J. Mawson will argue that one should start with the doctrine of God and allow that to determine one’s metaphysic on time. Others like Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann, and Brian Leftow have tried to remain agnostic on many issues regarding the metaphysics of time whilst articulating their doctrines of divine eternity. So why start with the metaphysics of time instead of delving straight into eternity?

The reason is quite simple. It makes no sense to ask what God’s relationship to x is if one does not have a clue what x in fact is. The answer will be different depending upon the content of x . The answer to “What is God’s relationship to mathematical entities?” will be different from “What is God’s relationship to watermelon?” The question “What is God’s relationship to sinners?” would receive a

²⁶ *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana, or, A Fabrick of Science Natural, Upon the Hypothesis of Atoms founded by Epicurus, Repaired by Petrus Gassendus, Augmented by Walter Charleton* (London: Tho. Newcomb, 1654), 72.

different answer than “What is God’s relationship to the redeemed?” Knowing what x is has a significant impact upon the work that must be done. It is ill advised to ignore the relevant issues involved in any given project. Just imagine a theologian working on the doctrine of atonement trying to remain agnostic on what the human predicament is. The theologian will make no progress at all. In such cases agnosticism is a hindrance if not an absurdity.

The situation is the same with God and time. If the project is trying to discern God’s relationship to time one can make no progress unless the doctrine of God and the metaphysics of time are both discussed. Which topic one wishes to discuss first may appear to be a matter of taste, but this is misguided. It is necessary to deal with time before asking whether or not God is temporal or atemporal. If one does not know what time is, she cannot meaningfully say that God is timeless. To say that God is timeless or atemporal is to deny of God any and all aspects of time. If one does not know what time is, one cannot deny it of God. It is intellectually irresponsible—if not outright impossible—to say that God is timeless without first having some idea of what time is. The concept of timelessness is dependent upon the concept of time, so time must be discussed first.

Another reason that it is necessary to get clear on time is due to theological obscurities and confusions. Sometimes philosophers and theologians will make bizarre claims about time and eternity, many of which stem from a fundamental lack of understanding on the basic issues within the philosophy of time. For instance, one can find theologians saying that God is trying to save us from time, or help us overcome time.²⁷ Once one gets a better understanding on the nature of time one will see that this claim is false. Part of time involves having a before and after. If a

²⁷Edward Epsen, “Eternity is a Present, Time is Its Unwrapping,” *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), 417. Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Knowledge*, 1.68-70.

temporal creature is pulled out of time—whatever that means—she will have a part of her life *after* her previous mode of existence.²⁸ Thus, she has not truly escaped time.

It is not hard to see where this confusion comes from. With regard to eschatology, we often speak about the forthcoming “end of time.” This phrase is unfortunate and derives from older translations of Revelation 10:6. For instance, the King James Version translates the passage as saying “time shall be no more.” Modern translations have corrected this error and render the passage as saying something like “no more delay,” (NIV and ESV) “there should be delay no longer,” (NKJV) or, “You won’t have to wait any longer,” (CEV). The eschatology of the Bible is best understood as “the end of an era” and not the end of time simpliciter. The Bible is concerned with the end of the age of evil, and establishing a new everlasting kingdom ruled by God where evil has no say anymore.²⁹ The prophetic and apocalyptic authors in scripture are best understood as speaking of God’s everlasting kingdom—a kingdom that endures forever and ever amen—and not making metaphysical assertions to the effect that time itself will end. It would be best if one could avoid confusions of this sort because the anticipation of this future kingdom is meant to shape how we live in the here and now. Antje Jackelen makes an interesting point in this regard. “If detemporalization is the goal of life, questions regarding the concrete shaping of life in time lose their urgency.”³⁰

Another common confusion is to try to say that God is timeless and temporal.³¹ Usually there is a bit of nuance to such statements, but ultimately they

²⁸ Keith Ward, *Science and Religion: The Big Questions* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 115.

²⁹ Antje Jackelen, “A Relativistic Eschatology: Time, Eternity, and Eschatology in Light of the Physics of Relativity,” *Zygon* 41 (2006), 962.

³⁰ Jackelen, “A Relativistic Eschatology,” 966. Also, Emil Brunner “The Christian Understanding of Time,” *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1951), 8-9. Henri Blocher, “Yesterday, Today, Forever: Time, Times, Eternity in Biblical Perspective,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 52 (2001), 199.

³¹ One example comes from Bruce Ware. “Amazingly, then, at creation God became both omnipresent and omnitemporal while remaining, in himself apart from creation, fully nonspatial and

break down into contradiction. Closely related to this, one can find theologians saying that the atemporal God experiences time.³² Perhaps, they might say, God experiences time differently than we do. This is a mistake, however, because an atemporal God cannot experience time. To have an experience of time takes time, and this is not something a timeless God can do.

A fourth confusion that is sometimes touted about is to find a third way. We need to get beyond the divide between timelessness or temporality, one might say.³³ Trying to find a third way is like hunting for snipe and haggis: it simply cannot be done. When it comes to whether God is temporal or atemporal, there simply is no third way. The two positions are logically contradictory. If they were logically contrary—like your pet is either a dog or a cat—we could find another option. With logically contradictory properties—such as either God exists or does not exist—there are no other options.

A final confusion that I wish to mention is that it is sometimes claimed that a Trinitarian understanding of God can save divine timelessness.³⁴ It is not clear,

timelessly eternal.” Bruce Ware, “A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God,” in ed. Bruce Ware *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2008), 89. Barthians seem to fall victim to this as well. Kevin Vanhoozer says that God is outside time and omnitemporal. Elsewhere he claims that God’s life is temporal because of God’s dynamic three-personed life. However, he says God does not have a before and after in His life. God simultaneously possesses succession such that there is no before and after in His life. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 255, 319-23, 454. Also, Adrian Langdon, *God the Eternal Contemporary: Trinity, Eternity, and Time in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*. McGill University, PhD thesis, 2008. Langdon explains that Barth’s view is a dynamic eternity because of the eternal movement and succession of the Trinitarian persons. However, this movement is simultaneous, or all at once, in the eternal now. This is divine timelessness. On divine timelessness God has no before and after, no moments in His life. As such the word ‘dynamic’ can have no meaning for Barthians. A further difficulty is that denying a before and after in God’s life would completely undermine Vanhoozer’s theodrama and Langdon’s narrative time because a God with no moments in His life cannot be an actor in the temporal world.

³² Epsen also makes this claim in, “Eternity is a Present,” 427.

³³ F. LeRon Shults asserts this without any suggestions as to what such a view would look like. Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 267-73. Bruce Ware actually makes a suggestion of what this looks like. See footnote 6 above. Eunsoo Kim also makes a suggestion, but it ends up looking virtually identical to the divine temporality proposed by Richard Swinburne and as such is not a third way. See Kim, *Time, Eternity, and the Trinity: A Trinitarian Analogical Understanding of Time and Eternity* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

³⁴ Epsen’s, “Eternity is a Present” is an example of this.

however, that the doctrine of the Trinity makes a difference to the question at hand.³⁵ The doctrine of the Trinity is certainly essential for Christians, but nothing about God being three persons and one essence sheds light on the coherence of divine timelessness. This is why one can find atemporalists and temporalists both articulating the doctrine of the Trinity. With that being said, let us begin to examine time.

The Metaphysics of Time

Relational and Absolute Theories of Time

What is time? One might say that time is what we use to measure change.³⁶ If there is a change there is a time. Or one might say that if there is a change there is a time, but contend that time is not identical to change. Perhaps time could exist without change.³⁷ There is disagreement over whether or not time can exist without change, but everyone agrees that if there is a change there is a time. (That is, unless one is an anti-realist about time.)

On a *relational* view of time, time just is change.³⁸ If there is a change there is a time. If no change ever occurred, then time would never occur. What must be understood is that any kind of change will get the job done; be it intrinsic or

³⁵ Antje Jacklene, *Time and Eternity: The Question of Time in Church, Science, and Theology* (London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), 98-109, and 190-7.

³⁶ This is Aristotle's claim. For discussion see E.J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 310ff. Also, John Philoponus, *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World 1-5*, translated by Michael Share (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2004), 82.

³⁷ Sydney Shoemaker "Time Without Change," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 66 (June 1969), 363-381. Also, Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1983), chapter 6. Robin Le Poidevin, "Time Without Change (In Three Steps)," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 47 (2010).

³⁸ This relational view of time should be distinguished from the so-called "Relational Ontology" that is all the rage these days in certain theological circles. In these circles one can find "relational" theories of time, but these theologians do not want their views to be confused with what philosophers have in mind. The main difference between the two is that one offers an analysis of time that is transparent, while the other intentionally does not. For instance, a theological approach to time on a relational ontology might define time as "the relation to the other." One could hear this definition and rightly ask, "So what is time?" See Jackelen, "A Relativistic Eschatology," 965 and *Time and Eternity*, 117. Also, Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 321.

extrinsic.³⁹ From the most boring and mundane changes to the most exciting and dramatic changes, if there is a change there is a time. This view is fairly intuitive, and it is hard to find any serious objections to it. The reason one might deny it is that she finds it more intuitive that time can exist without change. On an *absolute* view of time, time is duration. It can exist without change or movement.

The relational view of time dominated throughout most of Western Christendom. Yet as scholasticism drew to an end and the Reformation began, several dissenters can be found. The old Aristotelian philosophy of science started to give way to a new scientific revolution. Several theologians, philosophers, and scientists began to argue that time could exist without change, or at least without the motion of the celestial bodies. For instance, God could pause the movements of the heavens if He wanted to, and then unpause them. The argument is that time would continue during this period.⁴⁰ Such speculations led some to a rejection of the relational theory of time. This also led several thinkers like Nicole Oresme, Pierre Gassendi, Isaac Newton, and Samuel Clarke to equate God's immensity and eternity with absolute space and time. This move, however, led to a flight away from divine timelessness toward divine temporality.⁴¹ This flight was also due to the recognition that God not only causally sustains the universe in existence, but that the laws of nature are a manifestation of God's continual operation in creation.⁴² These thinkers did not see

³⁹ For more on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic change see Ross P. Cameron, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Properties," in eds. Robin Le Poidevin, Peter Simons, Andrew McGonigal, and Ross P. Cameron, *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁰ Nicole Oresme and Pierre Gassendi offer this type of argument by focusing on the story of God stopping the sun in Joshua 10. Oresme, *Le Livre du Ciel et du monde* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 375-7. Gassendi, *Physiologia*, 76.

⁴¹ Nicole Oresme espouses an absolute theory of time and space, but he continues to hold to divine timelessness. See *Nicole Oresme and the Medieval Geometry of Qualities and Motions* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968) translated by Marshall Clagett, 299. Also, *Le Livre*, 165, where he says that God "is without beginning or end and without succession, but is at once complete as a whole."

⁴² For example, John Tillotson, *The Remaining Discourses on the Attributes of God* (London: Rofe and Crown, 1700), 355-60. The Socinians seem to have rejected divine timelessness as well. The

divine temporality as a problem for theology. In fact, Newton thought equating God's immensity and eternity with absolute space and time was closer to the Biblical conception of God. He often invoked Acts 17:28, "in Him we live, and move and have our being."⁴³

Leibniz, however, disagreed. He thought Newton's ideas were detrimental to religion, and made this known in a letter which eventually sparked the famous correspondence between Leibniz and Clarke.⁴⁴ Part of their debate circled around relational and absolute theories of time. One issue that arose from this correspondence was how to understand absolute time.

For Newton, absolute time flows from God's necessary and eternal existence. Absolute time always exists because God always exists.⁴⁵ It is not that time is a property or attribute of God's, but rather that it necessarily exists because of God. In some writings Samuel Clarke seems to hold that absolute time is an attribute of God. However, in several letters he attempts to make his position clear by claiming that absolute time, or eternity, is a mode of existence.⁴⁶ In our own day absolute time has been articulated in several ways as it relates to God. For instance, J.R. Lucas argues that time and change are not analytically linked. "Even when nothing happens, we have some subjective sense of the passage of time, and that is enough to show that the concepts not only are distinct, but might be applied differently in some conceivable situation." Just like those before him, Lucas holds that absolute time depends on the

Racovian Catechism says that God's eternity consists only in existing without beginning and without end. Faustus Socinus, Valentin Smalcius, Hieronim Moskorzewski, and Johannes Volker, *The Racovian Catechism* (Amsterdam: Brooker Janz, 1652), 16.

⁴³ For discussion of this see Geoffry Gorham, "God and the Natural World in the Seventeenth Century: Space, Time, and Causality," *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009), 861-70. See also Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes: 1274-1689* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 18.

⁴⁴ H.G. Alexander, *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956).

⁴⁵ William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity: The Coherence of Theism II: Eternity* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 148-58.

⁴⁶ Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*. Edited by Ezio Vailati. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122-3.

personal God. Time exists because God exists. As he sees it, to “deny that God is temporal is to deny that he is personal in any sense in which we understand personality. To be a person is to be capable of being conscious, and to be conscious is to be aware of the passage of time.”⁴⁷ Alan Padgett has offered a slightly different articulation of absolute time reminiscent of Isaac Barrow’s view.⁴⁸ For him, “time is the dimension of the *possibility* of change. Change does not have to occur in order for time to occur, but the possibility of change follows from the reality of time.” With regard to God, Padgett holds that even before creation, “if it is *possible* for God to change, then God must in some weak sense be temporal.” The idea that it is possible for God to change is, in Padgett’s mind, crucial for theology. “If change was not possible, God could never create the world!”⁴⁹

There seems to be a possible perplexity in the notion of absolute time. On some articulations of absolute time it is said that time exists regardless of the things contained within it. Yet theistic defenders of absolute time hold that God is temporal—in time. It almost seems as if absolute time could exist without God. But that is not the claim being made. Samuel Clarke clarifies the point as follows.

God does not exist in space, and in time; but his existence causes space and time. And when, according to the analogy of vulgar speech, we say that he exists in all space and in all time; the words mean only that he is omnipresent and eternal, that is, that boundless space and time are necessary consequences of his existence; and not, that space and time are beings distinct from him, and IN which he exists.⁵⁰

Perhaps, then, the claim of theists who hold to absolute time should be something like the following. Time exists necessarily because an enduring God exists

⁴⁷ Lucas, “The Temporality of God,” in eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and C.J. Isham, *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 235-7.

⁴⁸ J.M. Child, *The Geometrical Lectures of Isaac Barrow* (London: The Open Court Company, 1916), Lecture I.

⁴⁹ Padgett, “Response to William Lane Craig,” in ed. Gregory E. Ganssle, *God & Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 168-9.

⁵⁰ Clarke, *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, 104.

necessarily. Time cannot exist without necessary beings, but time can exist regardless of what contingent beings exist within it.⁵¹ This distinguishes the theistic version of absolute time from a *substantival* theory of time where time is an independent being.

A quick summary seems in order. On the one hand, there are those who say that time is change, while on the other there are those who hold that time can exist without change. But such discussions, important as they are, only get us so far at this juncture. Though I think that time can exist without change, my arguments in this thesis shall not depend upon that doctrine since defenders of divine timelessness overwhelmingly hold to a relational view of time.⁵² As such I shall set aside that issue, and assume that at the very least, if there is a change there is time.

Beginning to Talk About Time

A-Theory of Time

In order to get a better handle on the nature of time the 19th century philosopher J.M.E. McTaggart proposed two main theories of time and gave them the most creative names in the history of philosophy: the A- and B-theories of time.⁵³ The A-theory goes by several names. In the literature one may come across terms like *dynamic time*, *process time*, and the *tensed theory of time*. All of these fall within the family of the A-theory. On this account time is held to be dynamic in the sense that it is constantly moving forward. There is an objective arrow of time that is rolling on. All events can be described in terms of past, present, or future. However, only the present can be spoken of as existing “now”. The “now” is treated as having some type

⁵¹ Thanks to Katherine Hawley for discussing this with me.

⁵² Rory Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 134ff.

⁵³ J.M.E. McTaggart, “Time,” in ed. Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings* (London: Routledge, 2001). Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 149.

of privileged status compared with the past and the future.⁵⁴ Every moment is relative to the present.

One reason often appealed to for holding this theory of time is that our language typically entails this theory of time.⁵⁵ When we speak we often use the present as a reference point for all other moments of time. “Yesterday I ran into Mrs. Jones.” “Tomorrow I am going to the movies.” “It is raining outside right now.” This is because all other moments are relative to the present on this theory.⁵⁶ Our language is filled with what are called *A-properties* and *B-relations*. *A-properties* are things that we predicate of moments that have pastness, presentness, and futurity.⁵⁷ For instance, the sentence, “Yesterday I ran into Mrs. Jones” contains an *A-property* because it is speaking about the past. *B-relations* work in a similar way. These are predicated of things that stand in earlier than, simultaneous with, or later than relations. The following sentences demonstrate this idea. “The death of Socrates is earlier than the death of Christ.” “While Ryan was typing his paper, there was street theatre going on outside.” “The birth is later than the conception.” The *A-theory* will use both *A-properties* and *B-relations* in describing the temporal aspects of reality, but will maintain that *A-properties* are more fundamental than *B-relations*.

B-Theory of Time

This theory can also go by several names. It may also be called *static time*, and the *tenseless theory of time*. On this account all instances of time are treated linguistically as if they have equal ontological existence. The contention of the *B-*

⁵⁴Gregory E. Ganssle, “Direct Awareness and God’s Experience of a Temporal Now” in ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 173-80.

⁵⁵A.N. Prior, “Thank Goodness That’s Over,” in ed. Michael Tooley, *Analytical Metaphysics: A Collection of Essays Volume 2: Time and Causation* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999).

⁵⁶Ganssle, “Direct Awareness and God’s Experience of a Temporal Now,” 173-80.

⁵⁷Garrett DeWesse, “Atemporal, Sempiternal, or Omnitemporal: God’s Temporal Mode of Being” in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 50.

theorist is that B-relations are more fundamental than A-properties. However, not all B-theorists will agree with this purely linguistic understanding of the B-theory. Many will argue that the B-theory entails a particular ontology of time called *eternalism*. This will be discussed below. On this understanding of the B-theory the difference between A- and B-theorists is not merely linguistic. Where the A-theory treated the present as having some objective privileged status, the B-theory holds that the past, present, and future are all objectively real. Technically speaking, there is no such thing as the past, present or future because such terms are subjective to an individual's reference point and as such have no objective purchase on reality. All moments of time exist. None of them pass out of existence. Events are in earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than relations. However, the experience of change from one moment to the next is merely subjective human perception.⁵⁸ The common sense intuition that we as humans experience a passage of time is merely an illusion.

B-theorists will often say that one needs to view time in spatial terms. One common metaphor is that time is like a map on the B-theory. Different events can be pointed out as if they were locations on a map because they all exist just like markers on a map. Or perhaps a better illustration would be that of a comic book where all of the panels of the comic exist and stand in sequential order.

A-Theory or B-Theory? What's the Difference?

It should be recalled that I mentioned earlier that the B-theory *linguistically* treats all of time as having equal ontological existence. The B-theory does not necessarily entail a particular ontology of time as some contend. In fact, it is not

⁵⁸ J.J.C. Smart, "The Tenseless Theory of Time," in *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, ed. Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 226-7. Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 62-3.

obvious that the A-theory entails a particular ontology of time either. The debates between A- and B-theorists should now be seen to be primarily linguistic, and not ontological.

For instance, one can put four A-theorists in a room. All four will be committed to the notion that the present has a privileged ontological status, and that time is essentially tensed, yet all four could disagree about the ontology of time. The first might say that only the present moment of time exists, while the second holds that the past and the present exist. The third might say that the past, present, and future all exist, but the now acts as a spotlight indicating which moment is present. The fourth person might claim that the present moment of time has the fullest degree of existence, but that other times have lesser degrees of existence relative to the present. All agree that time is tensed, and that the A-theory is true, but they do not agree on the ontology of time. Perhaps the A-theory is useful for getting our temporal language straight, but it does not seem to be useful for getting our metaphysics straight.

The same seems to be true for the B-theory of time. Once upon a time a defender of the B-theory would reject the technical use of A-properties and seek to translate everything into B-relations. The old B-theorist would acknowledge that A-properties are a part of common speech, but deny that such properties adequately describe reality. For many years B-theorists were engaged in the *detenser project*. This involved translating away tense from our language about time. For instance, one might say, "It is raining now." This sentence contains an A-property. The old B-theorist would try to offer an alternative tenseless sentence that contained the same propositional content as the tensed sentence. She might offer something like, "It rains at 2:00 p.m. on April 10, 2014." A-theorists argued that this sentence does not

express the same proposition as “It is raining now” and contended that tense was not something that could be eliminated from language about reality. In light of these debates a rare phenomena took place in philosophy; the kind of event that is only spoken of in fairy tales. A consensus arose amongst the philosophers. By the 1980’s philosophers realized that there is not a tenseless translation for every tensed statement.⁵⁹ The B-theorists abandoned the detenser project and headed off into new territory.

The new B-theory takes a different strategy. Instead of trying to eliminate tense from our language it seeks to offer tenseless truth conditions for tensed statements. Eric Olson lays out two basic rules for accomplishing this task. 1) “To say, at a time t , that x is present (or past, or future) is to say something that is true if and only if x is located at (or before, or after) t .” 2) “To say, at a time t , that x is now F (or was F , or will be F) is to say something that is true if and only if x is F at (or before, or after) t .”⁶⁰

It is at this point that we can see the B-theory need not be seen as entailing an ontology of time either. We can find individuals with radically different ontologies of time holding to the new B-theory. Individuals who hold that only the present exists, or that the past and present exist, or that the past, present and future all exist, can all hold to the B-theory of time.⁶¹ As with the A-theory, this may be helpful with regard to

⁵⁹ Micheal Loux, “Time: The A-Theory and the B-Theory,” in ed. Loux, *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*, 257-8. Also, Nathan Oaklander, *The Ontology of Time* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004).

⁶⁰ Eric T. Olson, “The Passage of Time,” in eds. Robin Le Poidevin, Peter Simons, Andrew McGonigal, and Ross P. Cameron, *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 443.

⁶¹ A couple of examples would be Craig Bourne, Joshua Rasmussen, and Michael Tooley. See Bourne, *A Future for Presentism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Rasmussen, “Presentists May Say Goodbye to A-Properties,” *Analysis* (forthcoming). Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Also, for a related discussion see Dean Zimmerman, “The A-Theory of Time, The B-Theory of Time, and ‘Taking Tense Seriously’,” in *Dialectica* 59, no. 4 (2005): 401-457.

getting our temporal language straight, but it is not enough to help us sort out our metaphysics.

For far too long the debates over the language of time have obscured the discussions over the metaphysics of time. This, in turn, has obscured the discussions over God's relation to time.⁶² As Storrs McCall points out, "Strictly speaking it is sentences and propositions, not time or truth or events, that are either tensed or tenseless."⁶³ The linguistic issues that are discussed in the A- and B-theories of time are important, but they simply do not tell us about the ontology of time. "[T]o give linguistic issues priority, and try to draw physical and ontological conclusions from them, is to put the cart before the horse."⁶⁴ In other words, if we are going to make any progress in our understanding of God's relationship to time, we need to stop talking about how to talk about time, and begin to do metaphysics.

Further, the debate between A-theorists and B-theorists is relatively new in the history of ideas. The distinction that McTaggart made was not a common distinction in earlier eras. The medievals, for instance, were not sensitive to such a distinction, so it will not be helpful to use these distinctions in assessing their thoughts.⁶⁵ What we need are metaphysical ideas that have been widely held in the past and today in order to properly assess different accounts of God's relation to time.

⁶² It is telling to note how many defenses of divine timelessness are made by *merely* invoking the word 'tenseless.' The assumption seems to be that 'tenseless' is equivalent to 'timeless,' but this fails to account for the fact that the tenseless theory of time is a theory of time. It is a theory about what is true *at particular times*.

⁶³ Storrs McCall, "Tooley on Time," in ed. L. Nathan Oaklander, *The Importance of Time: Proceedings of the Philosophy of Time Society, 1995-2000* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 13.

⁶⁴ McCall, "Time Flow," in Oaklander, *The Importance of Time*, 146.

⁶⁵ Fox, *Time and Eternity*, 180.

Getting Metaphysical

Knowing the basic distinction between the A-theory and B-theory of time may be helpful, but unfortunately not helpful enough. What will help us is looking at different ontologies of time and their complementary theories on persistence through time and change.

Presentism, Four-Dimensionalism, and Persistence Through Time

Four-dimensionalism and *presentism* are both theories about the ontology of time, or about what moments of time exist. Each is typically linked with a theory of change and persistence through time. Presentism is usually held alongside *endurantism*, whereas four-dimensionalism and *perdurantism* are taken as a package deal. Allow me to elaborate.

Presentism is the thesis that only the present, the now, exists. The past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist.⁶⁶ Time involves temporal becoming, or absolute generation, as well as real passage from one moment to the next. New things that did not formerly exist come into existence, and other things pass out of or cease to exist.⁶⁷ For the presentist, it simply is the case that the only objects that exist are the ones that presently exist. As Trenton Merricks says of presentism, “an object has only those properties it has at the present time. The difference between past, present, and future is metaphysical, not perspectival.”⁶⁸

On presentism, an object endures through time by existing as a whole, or all at once. To say that an object endures through time is to say that an object is wholly

⁶⁶Thomas M. Crisp, “Presentism,” in ed. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 212.

⁶⁷St. Augustine, *Confessions* XI.20. Anselm, *Monologion* 21, 22, and 24. Also, *Proslogion* 13, 19, and 22. Robert Pasnau, “On Existing All at Once,” in eds. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier, *God, Eternity, and Time* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011).

⁶⁸Trenton Merricks, “Goodbye Growing Block,” in ed. Dean W. Zimmerman, *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 103.

present at each moment of its existence. Numerically one and the same object exists at each time that it exists, and it does not have parts laying about at other times. Let us say that some object O begins to exist at time t_1 and persists all the way through to time t_3 . On this account O exists entirely at each instant of time. Given presentism, as t_2 comes into existence t_1 ceases to exist and t_3 does not yet exist. So O exists entirely at each instant only when that instant is the present. It is not as if O exists wholly at all of the instants of t_1 through t_3 simultaneously because all of those instances do not have equal ontological existence. As O endures through time it will gain and lose various accidental, or non-essential, properties. Let us say that O is an armchair. At t_1 the armchair is blue, and then at t_2 someone paints the armchair such that at t_3 the armchair is red. The armchair has retained all of its essential properties, but it has lost one accidental property—that of being blue—and gained a new accidental property—that of being red.

Four-Dimensionalism comes in two forms, but both have the same basic feature of seeing time as a four-dimensional spacetime manifold.⁶⁹ On the *eternalist* version of four-dimensionalism all moments of time have equal ontological existence. To put it roughly the past, present, and the future all exist, they are all equally real. To put it more technically there is no real distinction between past, present, and future. There just is the four-dimensional spacetime manifold with no privileged moment that marks the present.⁷⁰ On this account there is no real passage of time because all moments of time exist. Nothing ever comes into existence nor ceases to exist because everything simply does exist in the spacetime manifold. As such, the experience of temporal passage is illusory. The other version of four-dimensionalism is called the *growing block* view. Growing block theorists hold that spacetime is a four-

⁶⁹Michael Rea, "Four-Dimensionalism," in ed. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman, *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, 247.

⁷⁰J.J.C. Smart, "The Tenseless Theory of Time," *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, 227.

dimensional manifold, but they maintain that only the past and the present are real whereas the future is not. Time is dynamic in the sense that new things really do come into existence as new time slices are added to the four-dimensional spacetime manifold.

Time slices are merely instants of time that can stand in earlier than and later than relations. They are much like points on a map. In fact most four-dimensionalists see a close connection between being located in space and being located at a time, whereas presentists reject the similarity between being located in space and located at a time.⁷¹ For the growing block theorist new time slices are constantly being added to spacetime. The eternalist holds that all time slices simply exist in the spacetime manifold. None ever come into nor pass out of existence.

Presentists hold that objects endure through time; four-dimensionalists hold that objects perdure through time. According to Michael Rea endurantists hold that objects “last over time by being wholly present at every moment at which they exist,” whereas perdurantists hold that objects “last over time without being wholly present at every moment at which they exist.”⁷² As Sally Haslanger explains, “On the perdurantist’s conception of persistence, an object persists through time in a way analogous to how an object is extended through space.”⁷³ The perdurantist sees an object as being spread out across the four-dimensional spacetime manifold, and that object is made up of temporal parts. Each temporal part exists at a particular point in spacetime and together they constitute the object. The object does not exist as a whole

⁷¹Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 121-5. Also, Theodore Sider, “Four-Dimensionalism,” in *The Philosophical Review* 106, no. 2 (1997): 197 and 204.

⁷²Michael Rea, “Four-Dimensionalism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, 247.

⁷³Sally Haslanger, “Persistence Through Time,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, 318.

throughout time, but instead parts of the object exist at different times. On presentism and endurantism there simply is no such thing as temporal parts.

To complicate matters a bit, perdurantism comes in two forms: worm theory and stage theory. Both involve an object having temporal parts at times, and both explain change in terms of temporal parts. On worm theory objects “stretch out through time just as (we all agree) earthworms stretch out through space.”⁷⁴ When referring to an object we speak of the entire spacetime worm. On stage theory “the world is full of four-dimensional objects with temporal parts, but when we talk about ordinary objects like boats and people, we talk about brief temporal parts or ‘stages’ of four-dimensional objects.”⁷⁵ Perhaps an illustration will help.

Imagine that we ask Tony Bennett to sing “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.” The endurantist would say that Tony Bennett is entirely present throughout the 2 minutes and 46 seconds of his performance. There is numerically only one thing, Tony Bennett, which endures through the song. The perdurantist would see things differently. For each second of the song there is a temporal part of Tony Bennett. According to the worm theorist, when one puts all of the temporal parts together one gets Tony Bennett. Tony is not identical to any of the temporal parts, but somehow the temporal parts together constitute the spacetime worm that is Tony. (In calling Tony a worm this is not to say anything of his moral character. I’m sure he is a standup gentleman.) The stage theorist will say that each temporal part is Tony Bennett. There is the Tony Bennett that exists at t_1 and the Tony Bennett that exists at t_2 . Worm theory and stage theory have the same underlying perdurantist ontology. The difference between the two is over where the proper name goes. The worm

⁷⁴ Katherine Hawley, “Temporal Parts,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/temporal-parts/>.

⁷⁵ Hawley, “Temporal Parts.”

theorist holds that the proper name applies to the spacetime worm, whereas the stage theorist says the proper name applies to each temporal counterpart or stage.

It is sometimes held that endurantism could be compatible with four-dimensionalism. Yet most think that a problem arises from intrinsic properties and change if endurantism is combined with four-dimensionalism.⁷⁶ This is because the same object would have contradictory intrinsic properties. Say four-dimensional eternalism is true, and that every moment of “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” is on the same ontological par. If Tony were an endurant being, he would exist as a whole at every moment of the song. As such he would simultaneously have the properties of *signing I left my heart* at time t_1 and *on a hill it calls to me* at t_3 . He would have the properties *standing* at t_2 and *sitting at the piano* at t_4 . How can Tony be sitting and standing? Aren’t these contradictory intrinsic properties? Since Tony exists as a whole at each moment of the song, and since each moment of the song is equally real, all of the properties are within Tony’s domain of discourse.

How do we remove the contradiction? There are two moves that might seem obvious at first, but they are widely rejected by philosophers today. First, it might seem as if one could say that Tony only has the property of *standing* at t_2 and the property of *sitting* at t_4 . However, this move will not work since both properties are intrinsic to Tony, and as such this entails that Tony is sitting and standing. The reference to time here does not remove the contradiction. A second move might try to say that the intrinsic properties are really relations to times. So the property *sitting* is really a relation that Tony instantiates to time t_4 . This move has the unfortunate consequence of making all intrinsic properties relational properties. It removes the

⁷⁶ Crisp, “Presentism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, 220. Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 4. Also, Katherine Hawley, “Why Temporary Properties are not Relations between Physical Objects and Times,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. XCVIII, no. 2 (1998), pp. 211-16.

problem of temporary intrinsic properties by removing intrinsic properties, hence, why this move is typically rejected today.⁷⁷

The standard move for the four-dimensionalist is to adopt temporal parts. Tony Bennett does not have the contradictory properties. Instead, only the temporal part of Tony that exists at t_2 has the property *standing* and only the temporal part that exists at t_4 has the property *sitting at the piano*. The endurantist can remove the contradiction by adopting presentism. On this scheme, Tony had the property *standing* but that moment no longer exists, so Tony no longer has that property. He only exemplifies the properties that exist at the present moment.

Four-dimensionalism is often held to come with certain metaphysical commitments that a presentist and endurantist would most likely not accept. One such commitment is *universalism*. This should not be confused with the theological doctrine of universalism which is usually taken to mean something like all human persons go to heaven. The metaphysical doctrine of “[u]niversalism is the view that any collection of objects whatsoever has a sum, an object they compose.” This is sometimes called unrestricted mereology. “Any combination of temporal parts of any objects from any times, no matter how scattered and disparate, composes an object.”⁷⁸ It could be possible for a four-dimensionalist to reject this metaphysical doctrine, though that will depend on other metaphysical and theological commitments she holds. For instance, she might adopt universalism because she takes objects like bicycles and persons to be mere conventions.⁷⁹ Or she could hold to universalism in

⁷⁷ Ross P. Cameron, “Truthmaking for Presentists,” in Karen Bennett and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics Volume 6* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 62-3.

⁷⁸ Katherine Hawley, “Temporal Parts.” See also Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*, 7. Hud Hudson, *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5-9.

⁷⁹ Hawley, “Temporal Parts.” Also Mark Heller, “Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects,” in ed. Loux, *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*, 343-8.

order to argue that Christ's atonement involves fallen human persons becoming part of a larger four-dimensional object with Christ.⁸⁰

Another metaphysical commitment that four-dimensionalists typically hold, and that presentists typically reject, is *Humean supervenience*. Katherine Hawley describes this as the view that “facts about which intrinsic properties are instantiated at which points determine all the facts there are. There are no irreducibly holistic facts. In conjunction with perdurantism, this entails that all the facts about a given persisting object supervene upon intrinsic facts about its briefest temporal parts.”⁸¹ Again, a four-dimensionalist may reject this depending on her other metaphysical and theological commitments.

At this point one might wonder which theory is correct. It seems that presentism and endurantism go nicely together, whereas four-dimensionalism and perdurantism go hand-in-hand. Which set of theories is correct? What time is it? Presentism or some form of four-dimensionalism? These are important questions, but space does not allow me to offer an answer. Further, my strategy for assessing divine timelessness does not depend upon such a discussion. Most contemporary discussions on God and time hold that presentism is incompatible with divine timelessness, whereas four-dimensional eternalism is compatible with timelessness. The next move is to argue for the truth of either presentism or four-dimensional eternalism. This is not my strategy. Instead, I shall be arguing that divine timelessness is incompatible with both accounts of time. While I am a presentist, I do not seek to make my rejection of divine timelessness rest solely on this ontological commitment.

⁸⁰ Though Oliver Crisp does not explicitly endorse metaphysical universalism, it seems to me that is what is needed in order to make sense of his doctrine of the atonement. Oliver Crisp, “Non-Penal Substitution,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007). Also, Crisp, “Original Sin and Atonement,” in ed. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁸¹ Hawley, “Temporal Parts.”

An Excursus on Time and Divine Temporality

In the next chapter the question ‘what does divine timelessness mean?’ will be given a full treatment. A related question naturally arises. ‘What does it mean to say that God is temporal?’ By way of a sneak preview, to say that God is timeless is to affirm at least three things: that God exists without beginning, without end, and without succession. The divine temporalist will say that God exists without beginning and without end, but she will believe that God does have succession in His life. The divine life contains distinct moments. For instance, T.F. Torrance exclaims that “the creation of the world out of nothing is something *new even for God*.”⁸² Torrance also explains that the incarnation was not just a new event for the world, but was also a new event for God. In order to understand this Torrance posits a distinction between the created time of the universe and the uncreated time of God.⁸³ This is a common move amongst divine temporalists. The final distinction in this chapter to be considered is to distinguish *physical time* from *metaphysical time*. Since most, though not all, divine temporalists are presentists, the following should be understood in terms of presentism and endurantism. God is a temporal being who endures through time. His eternal now is not some static present that lacks a before and after. He exists in the ever fleeting present just like we do.⁸⁴ God does have a before and after in His life.

⁸² T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 208. Cf. Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 35. “God was there ‘in the beginning,’ but this is a new day for God, too. Given the divine commitment to relationships with the creation, God will never be the same again.”

⁸³ See Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 50-1. Various theologians make similar claims. For instance, Robert W. Jenson, “Aspects of a Doctrine of Creation,” in ed. Colin E. Gunton, *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History, and Philosophy*.

⁸⁴ J.R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality and Truth* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 217.

Physical Time

Often it is claimed that the beginning of the universe was the beginning of all of space and time. One might also say that time cannot exist apart from the universe. This is far from obvious. If the absolute theory of time is true, there is no need for the universe to exist in order for time to exist. All that is needed is some being with duration, and a necessarily existent God fits the bill.⁸⁵ If the relational theory of time is true, all one needs is some sort of change in order to have time, and change can occur without physical objects.⁸⁶

Someone might ask about the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Doesn't the Bible clearly teach that time came into existence with creation? No, it simply teaches that the universe came into existence a finite amount of time ago, and that the universe is contingent upon God. As Alan Padgett points out, "The doctrine of creation out of nothing does not necessarily imply a beginning to time. Rather, it points to the radical dependence of all other beings on the Being of God."⁸⁷ John of Damascus seems to agree. Unlike Padgett, Damascus holds that God is timeless, but much like Padgett, he posits that there was time before creation that could not be

⁸⁵ Lucas would think differently. He thinks that time is "a necessary concomitant of the existence of a personal being." Not any enduring object will do. Time stems from God because God is conscious and a free agent. Time exists because of who God is, and not any act that God performs. See his, *The Future*, 213.

⁸⁶ A common view in medieval theology is that the angels have their own time that is not associated with physical objects. All that is really needed is for God to do one thing and then another in order to generate time on a relational view.

⁸⁷ Alan Padgett, *Science and the Study of God: A Mutuality Model for Theology and Science* (Grand Rapids: Wb. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003), 129. C.f. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 180-90 and 222. Walton explains that the Ancient Near Eastern ontology is one of function. A thing exists when it has a function. So a thing, like water, might exist simpliciter before it exists in terms of having a function. Walton, however, doesn't flesh out the full implications of this. He says that Genesis 1 does not clearly teach *creatio ex nihilo* because the objects of creation might have existed simpliciter before God gave them a function. Yet, Walton also says that the passage teaches that God created time. However, it seems that if one were to be consistent with the functional ontology of the ANE world, Walton cannot say that Genesis 1 teaches that time began to exist simpliciter. Instead, the passage teaches that time began to have a function in the created order.

measured or divided.⁸⁸ It is not, nor has it always been, obvious to Christian theologians that time came into existence with creation.

In fact, the Bible clearly speaks of time before creation. Psalm 90:2 says, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” The from/to formula in this passage is a common formula in scripture used to denote a span of time. In this instance, the Hebrew word *olam*—sometimes translated as eternity depending on context—is used twice here to refer to the span of God’s life.⁸⁹ It quite literally means from perpetual duration in the indefinite past to perpetual duration in the indefinite future. This is a deeply temporal portrayal of God. Psalm 90 not only portrays God in temporal terms, it also speaks of God existing alone before creation. One would be hard pressed to say that this is not a temporal *before* since the language employed is explicitly temporal. As Gershom Brin points out, “The earliest time mentioned [in scripture] is that of the reality prior to the Creation.”⁹⁰ The idea that God existed temporally before creation is an important biblical theme which looks strikingly like what the temporalist wishes to say about God.⁹¹

One could, if she wants, hold that physical time came into existence with creation. She could argue that this is perfectly compatible with the Biblical teaching even though it is not necessitated by Scripture. Various contemporary philosophical and systematic theologians today will say that Scripture implies that physical time came into existence with creation, but it does not necessarily entail that metaphysical

⁸⁸ John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, II.1. For Padgett’s account see his *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1992).

⁸⁹ Gershom Brin, *The Concept of Time in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 95-103.

⁹⁰ Brin, *The Concept of Time in the Bible*, 179. See also, Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 58.

⁹¹ Mt 13:35, Mt 24:21, Mt 25:34, Lk 11:50, Jn 17:24, Eph 1:4, 1 Pet 1:20, Tit 1:2, 2 Tim 1:9, Heb 9:6, Jude 25, Ps 90:2, Rev 13:8, and Rev 17:8.

time came into existence. In order to understand this we will need to get clear on the difference between metaphysical and physical time.

Physical time is what is typically associated with our universe and it is said to have the following three features. First, physical time began to exist, or it came to be. Second, physical time can be measured. Third, the physical time of one world cannot relate to a separate physical world and its time series.

(1) Physical time began to exist. When creation began spacetime came into existence. This means that it has not always existed because it has a definite starting point. Physical time began when the universe began.⁹²

(2) Physical time can be measured. It can be measured because of a localized internal clock.⁹³ The way physical time is measured in a particular world depends on the laws of nature that are intrinsic to that world.⁹⁴ For instance, on earth we measure time based on our local intrinsic clock. That clock is based on the duration of the earth's rotation around the sun. This constant revolution serves as a local clock for those of us on earth. A planet on the other side of the universe would not measure time by our local clock because it does not revolve around our sun. That planet would measure time according to its' own local clock. Yet, these clocks can be synchronized because the universe has its own cosmic time as determined by the universes' background space, or the frame of reference of the universe at rest with respect to the cosmic background radiation.⁹⁵ The laws of nature are not localized, but are held to be consistent across the universe making it possible to have a cosmic time.

⁹²Gregory E. Ganssle, *Thinking About God: First Steps in Philosophy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 61.

⁹³Ganssle, *Thinking About God*, 61. Richard Swinburne's *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), chapter 4.

⁹⁴Garrett DeWesse, "Atemporal, Sempiternal, or Omnitemporal" in, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 50.

⁹⁵Quentin Smith, "A New Typology of Temporal and Atemporal Permanence," in *Nous* 23 (1989):311. See also, Craig, "The Elimination of Absolute Time by the Special Theory of Relativity", in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 139-47. John Polkinghorne, "The Nature of Time," in

(3) The physical time of one world cannot relate well to other worlds and their physical time. For instance, think of C.S. Lewis' classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The children in this story leave London and enter into another world called Narnia through a magical wardrobe. They reside in Narnia for many years, but when they return to London only a few minutes have passed by in London. This is because the local clock in Narnia is not based on the same clock that we on earth use. The claim is that there is no way for our measurement of earth time to apply to Narnian time because both worlds have separate physical clocks based on the laws of nature that are intrinsic to each world.⁹⁶

I am not suggesting that there is an actual Narnia. I am using it to illustrate an idea that is quite popular in physics today: the multiverse.⁹⁷ It is quite popular today to posit a multiverse that generates an infinite number of distinct universes, each with its own discrete time series. If there are multiple universes, each with its own intrinsic natural laws distinct from our own, it will not be possible for us to use our metrics to measure the time in those worlds. Or so the story typically goes.⁹⁸

ed. Alain Connes, Michael Heller, Shahn Majid, Roger Penrose, John Polkinghorne, and Andrew Taylor, *On Space and Time* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2008), 280.

⁹⁶For more on this theme see Michael and Adam Peterson, "Time Keeps On Ticking, Or Does It? The Significance of Time in *The Chronicles of Narnia*" in eds. Gregory Bassham and Jerry L. Walls, *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy: The Lion, The Witch, and The Worldview* (USA: Carus Publishing Company, 2005).

⁹⁷It should also be noted that the notion of multiple universes is an ancient concept. Aristotle, for instance, argued that there could not be more than one universe. Various Christian theologians rejected Aristotle's arguments and held that God could create multiple universes if he so desired. For instance, the 14th Century theologian and philosopher Nicole Oresme, *Le Livre du ciel et du Monde* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 149-79. In the 17th Century Gassendi used the concept of multiple universes and their separate time streams to argue against Aristotle's theory of time. See his *Physiologia*, 74-5.

⁹⁸In Gassendi's discussion he argues that the proponent of a relational theory of time cannot offer a way to relate the distinct universes together since they lack a time that is external to all of the universes based on some general motion that the universes have in common. But this seems to be a problem only for the relationalist, and not the absolutist. Perhaps the absolutist can appeal to Gassendi's distinction between the internal time of each universe, and an external time that they all belong to. Of course, this would entail that the multiple universes are in fact temporally related to each other in which case we no longer have multiple time series. For an argument that multiple time series are impossible see Richard Swinburne, *Space and Time: Second Edition* (London: The MacMillan Press LTD, 1981), chapter 10.

There is a further point to be made from this. This feature is also said to apply to worlds that lack physical objects and laws of nature as well. We cannot use our metrics based on our laws of nature to measure the life of angels, for instance.⁹⁹ Nor would we be able to use them to measure the souls that reside in the intermediate state awaiting resurrection.¹⁰⁰

Metaphysical Time

Metaphysical time is often associated with God's eternal, everlasting nature. In contrast to physical time, metaphysical time never came into existence. God resides in eternity. Eternity for the divine temporalist means that God has no beginning and no end. God's eternal now is fleeting in that God has moments that slough off into the non-existent past, and He has not-yet existing future moments. The difference between our now and God's eternal now is that God never came into existence. The now of physical time had a beginning, and it need not exist, whereas God necessarily exists.

Another difference that some divine temporalists draw out is that, unlike physical time, metaphysical time *cannot* be measured because it lacks an intrinsic metric.¹⁰¹ Typically, it is said to be amorphous: there is no constant metric by which one could neatly divide up the duration of moments.¹⁰² Prior to the creation of the world God exists without beginning and end in an unmetricated time. One might say this looks like a timeless existence since God's life lacks a beginning, end, and

⁹⁹Garret DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 243.

¹⁰⁰I must admit that this last point is a bit controversial since the intermediate state and mind-body dualism are hotly debated issues in contemporary philosophy of religion.

¹⁰¹Ganssle, *Thinking About God*, 61.

¹⁰²This is the view of contemporary temporalists like Dean Zimmerman, Richard Swinburne, Alan Padgett, and Garrette DeWeese. Newton and Gassendi seem to disagree and say that metaphysical time does have an intrinsic metric.

succession. However, this is false because in order to be timeless God must necessarily exist without succession and have no before or after. A temporal God contingently exists without succession for He can create moments in a variety of ways, many of which need not be creating physical objects.

The claim often made is that in this unmetricated state prior to the act of creation there is no way to measure God's metaphysical time, or what Dean Zimmerman calls "dead time." According to Zimmerman, in order to measure a temporal series one will need temporal intervals "consisting of a non-denumerable set of durationless instants." Further, one will need to have a set of coordinates that have the same "betweenness relations" or same length. Without an intrinsic metric this will be an arbitrary convention. The problem is that any such conventional metric could be devised to measure God's life, and there is no way in principle to say which one is wrong because every instant of dead time is intrinsically alike and is the same number of instants away from each other.¹⁰³

Yet, this is an epistemological problem. One might counter by saying, "Just because we cannot know which conventional metric to apply to God's metaphysical time prior to the act of creation does not mean that there is no right answer. Verificationist considerations like these simply will not do." The rejoinder from Zimmerman is to contend that without laws of nature "nothing could ground counterfactuals concerning what various kinds of clocks would or would not do throughout a given interval of pseudo-time."¹⁰⁴ In other words, there simply is not any way to measure metaphysical time since it necessarily lacks an intrinsic metric. Yet, Zimmerman's move is too quick. Just because metaphysical time lacks an intrinsic metric does not obviously entail that it is unmeasurable since we can come up with

¹⁰³Dean Zimmerman, "God Inside Time and Before Creation," in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 82-4.

¹⁰⁴Zimmerman, "God Inside Time," in, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 84.

conventional metrics. Perhaps the idea is that we cannot come up with any non-arbitrary objective measurements.

It should be noted that not every temporalist agrees that the metric of time is a convention absent uniform laws of nature. Some hold that metaphysical time does have an intrinsic metric, and as such it is measurable. This is a point of contention amongst divine temporalists that has yet to be sorted out.

Of course, the above considerations are with regard to God's life prior to the act of creation. In the act of creation God freely creates a universe with intrinsic laws of nature that serve as a metric for the physical time of that universe. In the act of creation God takes on succession in His life. Neil MacDonald refers to this as God getting Himself into our time. God freely takes on succession in His life so that He will be related to the creatures that He has made.¹⁰⁵ This statement is a bit misleading since—as we will see below—metaphysical time contains physical time. It would be more accurate to say that God brings creation into His time than to say that God gets Himself into our time.

Another claim amongst some divine temporalists is that any metric in the physical universe will fail to apply to metaphysical time.¹⁰⁶ It would make no sense to try to use physical time to measure God's eternal time. Physical time has a beginning, and metaphysical time does not. Where would one start their measurement of God's time? As Sir Isaac Newton once said, metaphysical time “exists regardless of the sensible and external measurements we try...to make of it.”¹⁰⁷

It is the case that the cosmic present marks a boundary for God because God cannot exist at our universe's past or future. Further, God's eternal now and our

¹⁰⁵Neil B. MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 79.

¹⁰⁶DeWeese, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 50.

¹⁰⁷As quoted in William Lane Craig, *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 107.

temporal now stand in a one-to-one correspondence. However, several divine temporalists claim that this does not entail that our temporal metrics apply to God. As DeWeese says, “As it is possible that there might not be an intrinsic metric to metaphysical time, it is possible that no quantitative temporal relations hold for [God]. What this means is that, although moments of a temporal world can be placed in a one-to-one correspondence with moments of metaphysical time, one could give no sense to the statement that a certain duration of metaphysical time lasted a certain number of seconds (days, years, and so on).”¹⁰⁸

DeWeese’s claim might strike one as rather odd. DeWeese gives us little by way of argument for thinking his claim to be true, nor does he fully explicate what he means by this statement. Other divine temporalists agree that it would certainly be the case that one could not use the metrics of physical time to measure the life of God prior to the act of creation, but argue that it is possible to do so subsequent to creation. Especially since God’s metaphysical time stands in a one-to-one correspondence with our temporal universe. It is the contention of William Lane Craig that cosmic time sets the boundaries for God’s time as He relates to our universe. Craig argues that since cosmic time is in a one-to-one correspondence with God’s metaphysical time we can measure the life of God subsequent to creation.¹⁰⁹ If certain divine temporalists wish to continue making claims like DeWeese’s it must be articulated why it is the case that the metric of this universe does not apply to God as He continually sustains this universe.

¹⁰⁸DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 253.

¹⁰⁹Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity*, chapter 7.

One possible avenue to take could come from the multiverse. If there are other universes with their own unique time series, God will be temporally related to those universes as well.¹¹⁰ As Keith Ward explains,

God will stand at every leading edge of every process, moving with it toward its own open future. God will not be confined to a particular time but will move forward with many nontemporally related times...[He] will enter into all processive times and will, thus, not be reducible to one linear temporal series into which they are all put.¹¹¹

One could argue that this would make it impossible to use our metrics to measure the divine life of God since God is related to multiple universes and their time series. However, one might wonder if God's eternal now would serve as a way to make each time series related to one another. Perhaps it is the case that the now of each universe is related because each now exists in the eternal now of God's metaphysical time. The now of each universe is simultaneous with God's eternal now, and thus simultaneous with each other. It would still be the case that each time series flows according to its' own intrinsic metric, and it would still be the case that each instant of time exists in God's now only when that instant in fact exists as the presentist sees things. On this model it would appear that God's eternal now serves as the boundary for each universe's cosmic time. This would be to reverse Craig's claim mentioned earlier. This is a very difficult topic, and the very existence of the multiverse is an issue of great debate. It is something that temporalists will need to consider if the scientific evidence for a multiverse becomes possible as science moves forward.¹¹²

This last point of contention brings us to the final theme that divine temporalists often articulate. Metaphysical time can relate to other universes and their times. This is because metaphysical time is the grounds of ordering relations of

¹¹⁰ Deweese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 243.

¹¹¹ Keith Ward, *The Big Questions in Science and Religion*, 126.

¹¹² As it currently stands, one simply cannot do any empirical research on universes that are causally, spatially and temporally unrelated to our own.

physical time.¹¹³ Physical time's existence and structure are completely dependent on metaphysical time. It is God's causal act of sustaining the universe that not only keeps that universe in existence, but also makes time flow in that universe. As such, God can easily relate to other universes with various physical time structures because His eternal time is what keeps those time structures in order.

Perhaps an illustration will help bring out this last point. Consider a comic book. The panels of a comic book could be thought of as periods of time standing in a successive temporal order. The order of these periods is due to the work of the author of the comic book. Yet, there is no flow of time in a comic book unless someone is reading it. In the very act of reading the reader creates a flow of time for the comic book. The reader's actions are what sustain the time of the comic book, yet the reader's time is not identical to the comic book. The reader can slow down or speed up his reading pace. He could even take a break from reading only to pick up the comic at a later date.

In a similar way, God's act of sustaining the world in existence creates the flow of time in our physical universe, and the same goes for any other universe that God may have created. Yet, one might contend that God's time is not identical to ours' because He could slow down or speed up the processes of the universe, or even cease to sustain the universe in existence.

¹¹³DeWeese, "Atemporal, Sempiternal, or Omnitemporal," *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 50.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS ETERNITY?

When you intend to know God... consider as you can the things about him, for example his eternity, immensity, infinity, his goodness, wisdom, and power which creates, governs, and judges creatures. For that person among others is a great theologian if he searches out the principles of these things, however much or little.

—Maximus the Confessor¹¹⁴

In this chapter I shall articulate the doctrine of divine timelessness and its systematic connections with divine immutability and simplicity. I shall also look at questions about eternal duration, and how to talk about timeless eternity.

Preliminary Remarks

As noted in the previous chapter, most classical theologians have tended to hold to a relational theory of time where time just is change. It was also noted that everyone agrees that if there is a change, there is time. This understanding of time played an important role in the articulation of divine timelessness and immutability. Along the way we shall also see the role that presentism and endurantism played in the articulation of divine eternity.

One final preliminary remark is in order before moving on: the use of temporal terms to describe timeless eternity. The concept of eternity is something developed over time throughout Greek philosophy and Christian theology. As the concept is developed theologians and philosophers were forced to use temporal words to describe timeless eternity. One early Christian statement of this sort on divine eternity can be found in Clement of Alexandria. “Eternity, for instance, presents in an

¹¹⁴ 400 *Chapters on Love* 2.27.

instant the future and the present, also the past of time.” (*Stromateis*, 1.13) Elsewhere he speaks of “the true to-day, the never-ending day of God, [which] extends over eternity.” (*Stromateis*, 9)

The use of temporal words to describe eternity can cause confusion in contemporary reconstructions of divine eternity. For instance, some will argue that classical Christian theology did not hold to a strict account of divine atemporality because they used temporal terms to describe God’s eternity.¹¹⁵ This, however, is a mistake. Even though classical Christians continually use temporal properties to describe God, they also continually claim that these should be understood in non-temporal ways when predicated of God.¹¹⁶ The move from these thinkers is to offer non-temporal readings of temporal terms like “present,” “is,” “always,” and “now.”¹¹⁷ Christian theologians have long held that inconsistency and difficulties in Christian doctrine naturally arises when one lets her pen slip into temporal phrases without qualifying their non-temporal sense.

This was an important issue in early Christian theology. Offering non-temporal readings of temporal terms played a major role in explaining the eternal generation of the Son and eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit. The early Church was at pains to explain this in a way that avoided the Arian claim that there was a time when the Son did not exist. The concepts of eternal generation and spiration are causal notions.¹¹⁸ This naturally lends toward the idea that the cause is temporally prior to

¹¹⁵ Brian Leftow, “The Eternal Present,” in eds. Gregory Ganssle and David Woodruff *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

¹¹⁶ Rory Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapter 1.

¹¹⁷ Maximus the Confessor is somewhat different in that he speaks of time as “beginning, middle, and end.” He says that God is our beginning, middle, and end in that God created us, sustains us, and is our goal. However, God is infinitely beyond beginning, middle, and end. We speak of God only by “fully excluding the notion of time” from Him. See his, *Chapters on Knowledge*, 1.1-10.

¹¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods*. “The principle of causality distinguishes, then, the Persons of the holy Trinity. It affirms that the one is uncaused, while the other depends on the cause.” Also, Alasdair I. C. Heron, “Homoousios with the Father,” in ed. Thomas F. Torrance, *The*

the effect. In this instance that would mean that God the Father exists prior to the Son and Holy Spirit. Hence the question, “How can Christ be a Son, without being younger than the Father: for anything which derives its being must be later than its source?”¹¹⁹

Early Christian theologians sought to avoid this by appealing to the non-temporal reading of eternity.¹²⁰ One example comes from Origen of Alexandria. In *On First Principles* 2.2, he claims that all three of the divine persons lack a before and after in their life. When it comes to speaking about God we are forced to use temporal expressions, but Origen explains that “the statements made regarding Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to be understood as transcending all time, all ages, and all eternity.” (*On First Principles* 4.28)¹²¹

It will be important to keep in mind the following things when reading the rest of this chapter: (i) the connection between time and change, (ii) presentism and endurantism, and (iii) the non-temporal usage of temporal terms.

What is Timeless Eternity?

The Protestant Scholastic Benedict Pictet states the doctrine as follows. “Eternity, properly so called, such as belongs to God, denotes three things: to be without beginning, without end, without succession. In this eternity we cannot

Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381 (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 60-1.

¹¹⁹ John Chrysostom deals with this question by appealing to God’s timeless eternity. See Chrysostom in ed. Henry Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 170.

¹²⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations*, 3.3.

¹²¹ For more on Origen’s articulation of divine timelessness see P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

conceive of anything prior or posterior, anything past, present, or future, since God is without beginning or end.”¹²²

The understanding of the atemporal God, then, means at least the following three propositions.

- 1) God exists without beginning.
- 2) God exists without end.
- 3) God exists without succession, or moments, in His life.

The divine temporalist will affirm (1) and (2). Indeed, most agree that this is the clear teaching of scripture. However, the temporalist will call into question (3).¹²³ Before calling into question (3) we will need to get a better picture of what Christians have held about God’s eternity. As we shall see, the ideas presented in Pictet carry a lot of theological and philosophical baggage. In particular, they are deeply connected with the doctrines of divine simplicity and immutability, as well as a relational view of time.

(1)-(3) carry wide assent throughout Church history. In discussing the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit, Gregory of Nyssa states, “Extensions in time find no admittance in the Eternal Life.” (*Against Eunomius* I.42)¹²⁴ In his answer to Eunomius, Gregory claims that creatures are circumscribed by time and place. Creatures have intervals in their lives, but God transcends all

¹²²Benedict Pictet, *Christian Theology*, (Philladelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1834), Book II.viii. See also Richard Stock, *A Stock of Divine Knowledge, being a lively description of the divine nature* (London: T.H. for Philip Nevil, 1641), 91. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Volume 1* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992), 202. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology Volume 1: The Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 275.

¹²³ Fox notes that succession was the fundamental basis in the Middle Ages for determining whether or not something was temporal or non-temporal. *Time and Eternity*, 226-7.

¹²⁴ Gregory of Nyssa’s conception of divine eternity is that God exists without beginning and without end. Also, he adds that the divine life has an “unbroken continuity, where no end and no parts can be recognized.” For a similar view, see Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations*.

intervals.¹²⁵ Augustine makes similar statements about the triune God. “In their own proper substance by which they are, the three are one, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, without any temporal movement, without any intervals of time or space, one and the same over all creation, one and the same all together from eternity to eternity.” (*The Trinity* IV.30)

But (1)-(3) is not the whole story. John Philoponus explains that eternity, as pertains to God, “has neither temporal position, nor priority and posteriority, nor any extension at all.”¹²⁶ The idea that God’s life does not have a before and after is a common theme in many Christian writers. Philoponus makes it quite clear that the idea of divine eternity must also include a lack of temporal position and extension. If something has a temporal position or extension it is in time. Anselm follows suit by proclaiming of God, “You exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside all time.” (*Proslogion* 19) So in addition to (1)-(3), we also need

(4) God exists without temporal position and extension.

The idea behind (4) is that God cannot be located in, nor circumscribed by, time. For many Christian thinkers like Anselm, (4) is a way of expressing God’s aseity and sovereignty over creation.

The notion that God lacks succession, temporal extension and location causes problems when it comes to articulating God’s omnipresence and conservation of creation. Christian theologians and philosophers in the past have been aware of this and have offered ways around this problem. A common strategy is to make a clear

¹²⁵ See also, David Bradshaw, “Time and Eternity in the Greek Fathers,” *Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 70 (2006): 311-66. Bradshaw claims that Gregory and other Greek theologians do not have divine timelessness in mind since they do not hold to the Western doctrine of divine simplicity. According to Bradshaw the Greek Fathers, going back to Athanasius, distinguish between things that begin and have intervals, and God who does not begin and has no intervals. But Gregory of Nyssa clearly has timelessness in mind since he thinks God exists without beginning, without end, and without temporal intervals, succession, or moments in His life.

¹²⁶ John Philoponus, *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World 12-18*, translated by James Wilberding (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2006), 65.

distinction between God's eternal present and our temporal present. 'Present' when used of God is given a non-temporal reading on this strategy. Boethius gives us a clear example of this move.

In *The Trinity is One God Not Three Gods* IV Boethius says,

"He is everywhere" does not mean that He is in every place, for He cannot be in any place at all - but that every place is present to Him for Him to occupy, although He Himself can be received by no place, and therefore He cannot anywhere be in a place, since He is everywhere but in no place. It is the same with the category of time, as, "A man came yesterday; God is ever." Here again the predicate of "coming yesterday" denotes not something substantial, but something happening in terms of time. But the expression "God is ever" denotes a single Present, summing up His continual presence in all the past, in all the present - however that term be used - and in all the future. Philosophers say that "ever" may be applied to the life of the heavens and other immortal bodies. *But as applied to God it has a different meaning.* He is ever, because "ever" is with Him a term of present time, and there is this great difference between "now," which is our present, and the divine present. Our present connotes changing time and sempiternity; God's present, abiding, unmoved, and immoveable, connotes eternity. Add *semper* to *eternity* and you get the constant, incessant and thereby perpetual course of our present time, that is to say, sempiternity.¹²⁷

Does giving God's present a non-temporal reading solve the problem? Does it assuage the tension of a timeless God sustaining a temporal world? We will have to wait and see. For now we must content ourselves with exploring the basic concept of timeless eternity.

One of the most quoted statements on divine timelessness comes from another work by Boethius.

Eternity is the simultaneous and complete possession of infinite life. This will appear more clearly if we compare it with temporal things. All that lives under the conditions of time moves through the present from the past to the future; there is nothing set in time which can at one moment grasp the whole space of its lifetime. It cannot yet comprehend to-morrow; yesterday it has already lost. And in this life of to-day your life is no more than a changing, passing moment... What we should rightly call eternal is that which grasps and possesses wholly and simultaneously the fullness of unending life, which lacks naught of the future, and has lost naught of the fleeting past; and such an

¹²⁷ Emphasis mine.

existence must be ever present in itself to control and aid itself, and also must keep present with itself the infinity of changing time.¹²⁸

Note that this statement also contains a clear distinction between our present and God's eternal present. Brian Leftow suggests that Boethius' use of "present" is a literal predication of God.¹²⁹ Perhaps the idea is that 'present' denotes what exists. Our present is fleeting because it stands between the non-existent past and the yet to exist future. God's timeless present does not have a before and after. It simply does exist. This is part of Gregory of Nyssa's conception of God's eternity. "He is always to be apprehended as in existence; He admits not a time when He was not, and when He will not be." (*Against Eunomius* I.42)¹³⁰

Anselm makes a similar statement. In *Proslogion* 22 he praises God by saying You have "neither past nor future existence but only present existence; nor can You be thought not to exist at any time." In *De Concordia* I.5 he continues this idea. In "time things move from past to future" and only the present moment of time exists. God's eternal present is different in that it has no movement from past to future. In "eternity there is only a present, nevertheless it is not a temporal present as ours is."¹³¹

The non-temporal reading of 'present' as applied to God seems to be a way of capturing the content of (1)-(4). It appears that, for classical theologians, certain predicates like 'present' can be applied literally to God because they can be given a non-temporal meaning that overlaps with the temporal meaning of 'present.' Other

¹²⁸Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, V.

¹²⁹Leftow, "The Eternal Present," in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 24. This is because Boethius is working out the Aristotelian categories and seeing which categories are appropriately predicated of God.

¹³⁰John Duns Scotus holds that eternity expresses an intrinsic mode of existence. See his *God and Creatures* 6.32.

¹³¹Søren Kierkegaard agrees. God is "eternally changeless, everything is for him eternally present, eternally equally present, no shifting shadow either of morning or evening, of youth or of old age, of forgetfulness or of excuse, no shifting shadow shifts him—no for him there is no shadow." Ed. Howard and Edna Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 489.

predicates, however, cannot be applied to God because He is timeless, immutable, and simple. At this point it will be helpful to see the systematic connections between divine timelessness, immutability, and simplicity.

Divine Immutability

Before delving into immutability it should be noted that there is an Aristotelian assumption with regard to modality that plays a major role in the development of divine timelessness. The presupposition is that immutability and necessity are equivalent. Also, mutability and contingency are equivalent.¹³² Any being that undergoes change cannot be a necessary being. Since God is a necessary being, He must be immutable. The two concepts are equivalent. It is also the case that necessity and eternity are taken to be equivalent.¹³³ A necessary being cannot begin or cease to exist. This is important for understanding several of the moves that Christians make in their articulation of eternity. For instance, John Duns Scotus argues that “Thou art a necessary being; and therefore Thou art eternal, because Thou hast at once an interminability of duration without a potency to succession. For there can be no succession except in that which is continuously caused, or at least in that which has

¹³² See the introduction to *John Duns Scotus: Contingency and Freedom: Lectura I 39* translated by A. Vos Jaczn, H. Veldhuis, A.H. Looman-Graaskamp, E. Dekker, and N.W. Den Bok (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 20. Jaczn *et al* explain how Scotus’ modality marks a clear break from this tradition that was not previously seen in Western Christian theology.

¹³³ Samuel Clarke does not hold that eternity and necessity are equivalent since he denies divine simplicity. However, he still sees the close connection between the two ideas. “The ideas of eternity and self-existence are so closely connected, that because something must of necessity be eternal independently and without any outward cause of its being, therefore it must necessarily be self-existent.” Further, “[t]hat being, therefore, which has no other cause of its existence but the absolute necessity of its own nature must of necessity have existed from everlasting, without beginning, and must of necessity exist to everlasting without end.” *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Section V. Descartes also links eternity and necessary existence. Like Clarke, he does not link it with timelessness. See Geoffrey Gorham, “Descartes on God’s Relation to Time,” *Religious Studies* 44 (2008), 422-3.

its being dependent upon another; and this dependence is far from that which is necessary of itself in being.”¹³⁴

This assumption plays a major role in the 6th Century debate between Proclus and John Philoponus. Part of Proclus’ argument is that the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* conflicts with divine timelessness, immutability, and simplicity. If God were to create the universe out of nothing, He would undergo a change. As such, the Christian God would not be immutable. If the Christian God is mutable, He must be contingent. As such, the Christian God would be the creature of a genuinely perfect God.¹³⁵ This will be given a full treatment in a later chapter. For now it is important to note the strong connection between necessity, timelessness, and immutability.

Pseudo-Dionysius clearly links the notion of immutability with divine eternity. This is a common theme throughout Christian history. The assumption is that time involves change or motion, so God must be changeless in order to be timeless.¹³⁶ The way Pseudo-Dionysius expresses divine timelessness picks up on the themes discussed above as well as the connection with immutability. He writes,

“Ancient of Days” is a title given to God because He is the Eternity of all things and their Time, and is anterior to Days and anterior to Eternity and Time. And the titles “Time,” “Day,” “Season,” and “Eternity” must be applied to Him in a Divine sense, to mean One Who is utterly incapable of all change and movement and, in His eternal motion, remains at rest; He transcends both Rest and Motion; and Who is the Cause whence Eternity, Time, and Days are derived. (*The Divine Names*, 10.2)

In speaking of God’s beauty, he explains that God is beautiful in and of Himself. He was not beautiful at one time, and then not at another because God is eternally beautiful. (*The Divine Names*, 4.7) Pseudo-Dionysius speaks in a similar way with

¹³⁴ Evan Roche, *The De Primo Principio of John Duns Scotus: A Revised Text and a Translation* (Washington D.C.: The Franciscan Institute, 1949), 143-5.

¹³⁵ John Philoponus, *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World 1-5*, translated by Michael Share (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2004), 42, 50, and 64.

¹³⁶ In *The Divine Names* 4.4 Pseudo-Dionysius claims that the constant change and movement of the heavenly bodies is the basis for time and our measurement of time.

regard to God's actions. God cannot act at one time and not at another. If God did, He would suffer change, and thus not be eternal. (*The Divine Names*, 4.21)

Augustine makes the same connection between timelessness and immutability. Like Pseudo-Dionysius, he also connects time with change. "Since the flight of time involves change, it cannot be co-eternal with changeless eternity." (*City of God* XII)¹³⁷ In *The Trinity* IV he says, "For God's essence, by which he is, has absolutely nothing changeable about its eternity or its truth or its will." Later on he says God should be understood as "wholly everywhere without place, everlasting without time, without any change in himself making changeable things, and undergoing nothing." (*The Trinity* V.2)

Thomas Aquinas also makes the connections between time and change, as well as necessity, timelessness, and immutability. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.99 Aquinas argues as follows. "God is utterly unchangeable...that which begins or ceases to live, or is subject in living, is changeable...Therefore God neither began to be, or will cease to be, nor is subject to succession in living. Therefore His life is eternal."

In later chapters there will be a lengthy discussion of how a timeless and immutable God relates to an ever changing world. For now it will be helpful to begin to see the connections between relational and accidental properties, and divine timelessness and immutability.

In *The Trinity* V Boethius turns his attention to the topic of relations. Relational predicates denote a substance's relation to other objects. "It cannot therefore be affirmed that a category of relation increases, decreases, or alters in any way the substance of the thing to which it is applied." He offers an illustration. Say a

¹³⁷ Aquinas in *On the Eternity of the World* 11 says "nothing can be co-eternal with God, because nothing can be immutable save God alone."

man is standing in front of you. You walk up to him and stand to his left. Then you stand to his right. The man has different relational properties depending upon your position in relation to him, but his essence has undergone no intrinsic change. Such “predicates which do not denote the essential property of a thing cannot alter, change, or disturb its nature in any way.” I take it that such predicates might be appropriately used of God since this would not change His essential nature. However, that does not seem to be the view of Boethius and other classical theologians.

In *Sentences* I, Distinction XXXVII.7, Peter Lombard explains how things change according to time.

But to change through time is to become different according to their interior or exterior qualities which are in the very thing that is changed, as when it undergoes a vicissitude of joy, suffering, knowledge, forgetfulness, or a change of form or of some other exterior quality. For this change which happens according to time is a change of qualities which happens in the bodily or spiritual creature, and so it is called time.

Any kind of change, intrinsic or extrinsic, will make an object temporal. Lombard holds that God is simple and immutable, and as such He cannot undergo any intrinsic changes. (Dist. VIII) Further, he holds that God cannot undergo any extrinsic change.¹³⁸ For instance, when temporal creatures refer to God it would seem that God would undergo an extrinsic change and thus Himself be temporal.¹³⁹ When a human worships God and says, ‘You are my Creator and Redeemer’ she is predicating an accidental property of God. Lombard understands this, so he follows Augustine by

¹³⁸ In personal correspondence Paul Helm seems to disagree, but in his written work he does agree with this statement. The relevant sense of immutability needed to maintain divine timelessness must deny any kind of change, including mere Cambridge change. Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time, Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19. John Sanders, no defender of atemporality, concurs as well. “It is logically inconsistent to affirm divine atemporality and that God changes because a timeless being cannot change, for change involves time.” See Sanders, “Response to Ware,” in ed. Bruce Ware, *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 140.

¹³⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring About God: Selected Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 153.

holding that the accidental properties that creatures predicate of God do not apply to God. (Dist. XXII, XXX, and XXXIX)¹⁴⁰ The take away from this is that to be in time is to undergo intrinsic and extrinsic change. To be timeless is to undergo no changes whatsoever.¹⁴¹ As such, we must add the following to (1)-(4):

(5) God undergoes no intrinsic or extrinsic changes.

At this point it will be helpful to sum up the discussion before moving on to other issues. So far we can see that divine eternity involves existing without beginning, without end, without succession, without intrinsic or extrinsic change, and without temporal location or position. Now we can turn to the topic of divine simplicity to see how it fits with timelessness and immutability.

Divine Simplicity

What does it mean to say that God is simple? Peter Lombard offers the following definition of divine simplicity. “The same substance alone is properly and truly simple in which there is no diversity or change or multiplicity of parts, or accidents, or of any other forms.” (*Sentences I*, Dist. VIII.3)¹⁴² A standard account of divine simplicity in the contemporary literature looks as follows.¹⁴³

6) God cannot have any spatial or temporal parts.

¹⁴⁰ Aquinas offers a similar treatment in *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.12.

¹⁴¹ Anselm agrees that God cannot undergo any change, but he allows for some accidental predicates to be said of God. He does not think that all accidental predicates would change God. *Monologion* 25. Yet, he is assuming that such accidents are not really properties at all since they do not really bring about a change. Brian Leftow concurs in “Eternity and Immutability” in ed. William E. Mann *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005). Leftow and Anselm both have in mind Cambridge change, and both deny that Cambridge changes are in fact changes. Francis Turretin makes a similar claim in *Institutes Volume 1*, 205.

¹⁴² Lombard is explicitly following several Christian theologians: Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers, Boethius, and Jerome.

¹⁴³ Kevin Timpe, ‘Truth Making and Divine Eternity’, *Religious Studies* 43 (2007), 299. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 96-7. Jeffrey E. Brower, ‘Simplicity and Aseity’, in eds. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105. Brian Davies, ‘Simplicity’, in eds. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37-40.

- 7) God cannot have any intrinsic accidental properties.
- 8) There cannot be any real distinction between one essential property and another in God's nature.
- 9) There cannot be a real distinction between essence and existence in God.

Before delving into these theses it would be good to have an understanding of real distinction. Within the Middle Ages it was common to hold that things can be really distinct or conceptually distinct. To say that there is a real distinction between some thing A and some thing B is to say that there is an extramental feature in reality that makes them distinct. For instance, there is a real distinction between a glass and the water it contains. A real distinction is contrasted with a conceptual distinction. To say that two things are conceptually distinct is to say that there is no extramental feature in reality that makes them distinct. The distinction exists in our minds only. For instance, one might say that Clark Kent and Superman are distinct, but in reality this distinction exists in our minds only since Clark Kent is the same person as Superman. In other words, Clark Kent is identical to Superman. Towards the end of the Middle Ages John Duns Scotus introduced a formal distinction that lies between real and conceptual distinctions. To say that two things are formally distinct is to say that there is some extramental feature in reality that makes them distinct, yet they are coextensive and inseparable.¹⁴⁴ With this in mind we can return to the set of theses noted above.

The big idea behind (6) is that God does not have any physical or metaphysical complexity. The assumption is that in order to be spatial a thing must have physical parts. God is immaterial, so God does not have any physical parts.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 108-9. John F. Wipple, "Metaphysics," in ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Scott MacDonlad, "The Divine Nature," in ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

What about temporal parts? The concept of temporal parts is tricky here. What we would call temporal parts in our day is not the same concept. During the Middle Ages it was common to distinguish between an enduring object and the life of the object. The object endures through time and can be properly said to exist as a whole, or all at once, in the present. The present is the only moment that exists, so an enduring object does not have parts lying about at other times. Yet, we can draw a conceptual distinction and say that the enduring object has a before and after in its life. Its life can be conceptually divided up into parts.¹⁴⁵ Yet even conceptual distinctions are repugnant to divine simplicity. As Anselm explains, “what either actually or conceptually has parts can be divided into parts, and this is altogether foreign to God.” (*Incarnation of the Word VII*)¹⁴⁶ When classical theologians deny that God has temporal parts this is what they have in mind. They are asserting that God has no before and after in His life because He has no distinct moments in His life at all. There is just the one timeless present. On their understanding, this makes God a truly permanent entity.

If conceptual distinctions cannot even be applied to a simple God, it would seem that Christian theology is a non-starter. This can be seen in the way theologians are forced to talk when trying to be consistent with the doctrine of divine simplicity. Say one has a theological puzzle, any theological puzzle that comes to mind. In order to remove the puzzle one must offer a careful distinction in God. Perhaps one will need to distinguish between God’s act and thought. Or maybe one needs to distinguish

¹⁴⁵ See Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes: 1274-1689* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 18. Also, Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, 122.

¹⁴⁶ Avicenna concurs that even conceptual distinctions are foreign to the simple God. Jon McGinnis, ‘Avicenna (Ibn Sina)’, in eds. Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis, *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion Volume 2: Medieval Philosophy of Religion* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2009), 64. Compare a similar statement made by James Arminius in his *25 Public Disputations*, Disputation IV.XI. “Simplicity is a pre-eminent mode of the Essence of God, by which he is void of all composition, and of component parts whether they belong to the senses or to the understanding.” James Nichols trans. *The Works of James Arminius: The London Edition, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 115.

between God's permissive and active will. It does not really matter. In practice divine simplicity forces the theologian to say something rather embarrassing. After the theologian has spent dozens of pages making careful distinctions in God to remove the paradox she must admit that her distinctions exist in her mind only. They do not apply to God at all.¹⁴⁷ In other words, she has just committed all of her work to the flames. But set aside this problem for the moment.

(7) would appear to allow God to undergo extrinsic change, but as noted above in (5), classical theologians have already denied this possibility of God in the doctrine of divine timelessness and immutability. This is important to note since several contemporary defenders of divine simplicity have not acknowledged this. For instance, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann claim that a simple God cannot be exempt from having extrinsic accidental properties.¹⁴⁸ What they have in mind are properties like *being referred to*. This is completely contrary to the doctrine of God as spelled out by classical theologians. Augustine, Boethius, Lombard, and Aquinas all deny extrinsic accidental properties of God. Standard examples are things like *Creator, Redeemer, and Lord*. James Arminius adds *Judge of all men* to the list as well. For these theologians God cannot have these accidental predicates because that would entail that God came to have them, and thus He would be mutable, temporal and not simple. Classical theologians held that we can refer to God, but that we must

¹⁴⁷ For moves of this sort see John Philoponus, *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World 1-5*, translated by Michael Share (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2004), 62. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* QII.14. James Arminius, Disputation IV.XI. Katherin Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 31-8. Nicholas of Cusa uses simplicity and infinity to argue that there is no difference between Christian belief in the Trinity and the Jewish and Islamic denial of the Trinity. See Jasper Hopkins, 'Nicholas of Cusa', in *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion Volume 2*, 243.

¹⁴⁸ Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 354.

realize that our accidental predicates only befall us and not God.¹⁴⁹ In allowing extrinsic accidental properties to apply to God, Stump and Kretzmann have failed to see how truly radical the doctrine of divine simplicity is. They have also failed to see the systematic connections between simplicity, immutability, and timelessness.¹⁵⁰

(9) comes from Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* I.Q3.a4, and similar statements can be found in Anselm and Augustine. It is taken to be part of what makes God unique from creatures. Of course, one might wonder what this means. This will become clear when one understands (8). There can be no real distinction in God's attributes because the attributes are all identical to each other and identical to God.

Sometimes divine simplicity is taken to be that all of the essential divine attributes are mutually entailing. As such, one might wonder if (8) is an accurate portrayal of divine simplicity. Augustine almost seems to be saying this in several places. In *The Trinity* XV.7 Augustine argues that God is genuinely immortal since He never started to exist, and never can cease to exist. So, genuine immortality is unchanging. "But that is also genuine eternity by which God is unchangeable, without beginning, without end, and consequently incorruptible. Therefore one and the same thing is being said, whether you say God is eternal or immortal or incorruptible or

¹⁴⁹ Augustine, *The Trinity* V.17. Boethius, *The Trinity Is One God Not Three Gods* IV. Peter Lombard, *Sentences* Book I Dist. XXX.1. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.12. Arminius, Disputation IV.XIV.

¹⁵⁰ Of course, they admit that they are weakening the claims of divine simplicity. See, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 369, and their "Simplicity Made Plainer," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987). For a critique of their move see Katherin Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996). What Rogers understands, and what Stump and Kretzmann have seem to missed, is that divine simplicity is a determinate concept that cannot be weakened without destroying all of the other elements of the doctrine. If we allow for God to have an accidental property we have (i) said that God has properties, (ii) said that God has accidental properties, (iii) introduced diversity in God, and (iv) introduced potential into God since there are other ways He can be. In other words, we have abandoned the basic claims of divine simplicity, as well as undermined timelessness and immutability.

unchangeable.” Whether you say that God is wise, powerful, living, understanding, or beautiful, “[t]he same thing is being said.”

It is easy to see how one could get mutual entailment of the divine attributes from a statement like this, but a careful reading of Augustine shows that divine simplicity is a much stronger claim. “But for God it is the same thing to be as to be powerful or just or wise or anything else that can be said about his simple multiplicity or multiple simplicity to signify his substance.” (*The Trinity* VI.6) Elsewhere he makes it even clearer that divine simplicity involves (8).

God however is indeed called in multiple ways great, good, wise, blessed, true, and anything else that seems not to be unworthy of him; but his greatness is identical with his wisdom (he is not great in mass but in might), and his goodness is identical with his wisdom and greatness, and his truth is identical with them all; and with him being blessed is not one thing, and being great or wise or true or good, or just simply being, another. (*The Trinity* VI.8)

This is the way Christians throughout history have understood divine simplicity.¹⁵¹ For instance, the 17th Century English theologian Richard Stock notes that

it appears, that however these things are attributed to God, that he is love, mercy, favour, and anger, howsoever they are spoken, as though they were many and different, yet in God they are but one, and the same. True it is, that we are of a compounded understanding, they are as severall things to us; because we cannot conceive God as he is, yet by faith, we are brought to beleve that there is no such difference between them in God: that which is the

¹⁵¹ Boethius follows Augustine on the doctrine of divine simplicity. See *The Trinity is One God Not Three Gods* IV. See also Anselm, *Monologion* 16-17. Aquinas does the same throughout *Summa Contra Gentiles* book I. John Duns Scotus seems to be one of the few Christians to dissent from this in the Middle Ages by employing his formal distinction, but this dissent is minimal. He still claims that all of the attributes are identical and that there is no composition in God. He also continues to hold that God is pure act. See his *De Primo Principio*, 143-5. Arminius follows Augustine, but suggests that it might be possible to allow the formal distinction. See his Disputation IV.XI. The Socinians rejected the doctrine along with the Trinity. Samuel Clarke did not seem to be a fan of divine simplicity either, but did defend the Trinity. Rene Descartes accepted a traditional account of divine simplicity. Spinoza attempted to maintain divine simplicity, but it is hard to see how his pantheism, or atheism, succeeds. Despite dissent, many in the Reformed tradition continued to hold to this conception of divine simplicity. For discussion of the Reformed tradition, see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 3: The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 273-82. For a discussion of the doctrine in the Middle Ages and in the contemporary scene see William Vallicella, “Divine Simplicity,” in ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity/>.

love of God, is the hatred of God; and that which is his wisdom, is his power also; because there is but one and the same Essence. [*sic*]¹⁵²

Stock, like so many others throughout church history, is following Augustine's moves in *The Trinity*.

Augustine continually argues throughout *The Trinity* that all of God's essential divine attributes are identical to each other. On divine simplicity, anything that one might predicate of God should be understood as signifying the divine substance. One could say that God is eternal, immortal, incorruptible, unchangeable, living, wise, powerful, beautiful, and so forth. Yet all of those terms signify the divine substance. They are not qualities or properties that God has because they are identical to God. (*The Trinity* XV.8)¹⁵³ Creatures have properties by participating in goodness, wisdom, life, and so on. God, who is the greatest being, does not have goodness by participating in something else. Goodness is identical to His essence, and God is identical to His essence. So God is the Good. (*The Trinity* V.11) Other things have an essence and subsist, or underlie, the properties they have. Not so with the simple God. "[I]t is impious to say that God subsists to and underlies his goodness, and that goodness is not his own substance." (*The Trinity* VII.10) As Katherin Rogers points out, the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity denies that God has any properties. "With God we do not hypothesize any unity underlying the diversity because there is no diversity."¹⁵⁴ Rogers claims that Plantinga style arguments against simplicity fail because they neglect this point by treating God as if He has properties, or is a

¹⁵² Stock, *A Stock of Divine Knowledge, being a lively description of the divine nature* (London: T.H. for Philip Nevil, 1641), 88.

¹⁵³ Maximus the confessor agrees. "In the multiple there is diversity, unlikeness, and difference. But in God, who is eminently one and unique, there is only identity, simplicity, and sameness." *Knowledge of God*, 1.83. Cf. John Duns Scotus. "There is nothing in the divine that is not the same thing as the divine essence and also the same as anything essential, so that considering such in the abstract, one can say simply 'This is this'." (*God and Creatures* Q5.34) It should be noted that Scotus is innovative in that he allows for the divine attributes to be formally distinct.

¹⁵⁴ Katherin Rogers, 'The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', 166, see also 173. Also, Henry Church, *Miscellanea Philo-Theologica* (London: I.N. for John Rothwell, 1638), 23.

property.¹⁵⁵ These types of objections fail to see how truly radical divine simplicity is.¹⁵⁶

One additional claim is needed to flesh out divine simplicity. There is one final aspect of simplicity that is sometimes overlooked in contemporary discussions: God is pure act.¹⁵⁷ As Aquinas explains, composite things have potential. They move from potential to actual. But God is simple, so He must lack potentiality and be pure act. (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I.16-18) One example of this idea is that God just is His act of existence. (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I.22) God is not something that underlies His properties because He does not have any properties. God does not go from potential to actual for He is pure act. God's act is identical to God, and not something distinct. "His action is His being...God's action is His substance." (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.9) "[T]he manifold actions ascribed to God, as intelligence, volition, the production of things, and the like, are not so many different things, since each of these actions in God is His own very being, which is one and the same thing." (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.10)

How does simplicity connect with timelessness and immutability? As Augustine explains, "Nothing simple is changeable; everything created is changeable." (*The Trinity* VI.8) Again, on a relational understanding of time, time just is change. If God is unchanging, He is timeless. A simple God has no properties. "So

¹⁵⁵ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 27. The types of objections she has in mind come from Alvin Plantinga and Thomas Morris. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980). Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

¹⁵⁶ However these arguments do bring out a relevant objection that John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham both noticed and criticized Aquinas for failing to answer. Our concepts are clearly not identical to each other, and yet they are supposed to be identical in God. What do our concepts hang on? They can't apply to the simple God for there is no diversity in Him. See Richard Cross, 'John Dun Scotus' and Gyula Kilma, 'William of Ockham', in *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion Volume 2*.

¹⁵⁷ See Rogers, 'The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', for more on this. Also, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, translated by Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 220.

there is no modification in God because there is nothing in him that can be changed or lost.” (*The Trinity* V.5)

Further, a being who is pure act does all that He does in one timeless present. He simply is His act of thinking, willing, creating, and so on. If God went from potential to act, He would have accidental properties. But as pure act, He has no accidental properties. Since He has no accidental properties, or any properties at all, there is no worry of Him changing or persisting through time. Objects that persist through time are constantly gaining and losing accidental properties. God has no accidental properties, so—the argument goes—He is timeless.

Does Eternity Have Duration?

A point of contention in contemporary debates is over eternal duration. Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump, and Norman Kretzman hold some version of atemporal duration.¹⁵⁸ It is not difficult for them to maintain that Christians have traditionally believed in atemporal duration since one could easily find statements from Christians in the past that speak of atemporal duration.¹⁵⁹ In the Middle Ages duration is predicated of anything that has existence, be it temporal or non-temporal.¹⁶⁰ In fact, one of the main reasons for thinking that God is timeless is by arguing that endurance

¹⁵⁸ Stump, Eleanor and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity” *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-458. Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹⁵⁹ For instance, Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.35. Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, Disp. 48. Also, the Post-reformation protestant theologians were insistent on God’s eternal duration. See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics vol 3: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 345-64. The dialogue partners in Nicholas Malebranche’s *Dialogues on Metaphysics*, dialogue 8 hold to eternal duration. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, XV, 12. Also, Stephen Charnocke, *Several Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Newman, 1682), 181ff. One can even find similar statements about God’s duration in Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, V.6. Also, Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology Volume 1: The Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 276: “Time is duration measured by successions. Duration without succession would still be duration, though it would be immeasurable.”

¹⁶⁰ Fox, *Time and Eternity*, 36-8.

in creatures is a perfection to be predicated of God.¹⁶¹ To endure is to exist as a whole through time. The perfection that is said to be derived is that of existing as a whole or all at once. Yet, when applied to God it is given a non-temporal reading.

For Anselm, a man can exist as a whole throughout time. A man exists as a whole at each time when that time is present. Since the present is the only moment that exists, the man exists as a whole at the present and does not have parts at other times. Yet, the man's life can be conceptually divided into parts because he has a before and after in his life. He no longer enjoys the past and does not yet enjoy the future. (*Monologion* 21) Anselm wishes to say that God also exists as a whole, but in a non-temporal way. Eternity lacks a before and after. Unlike the temporal present, eternity does not have moments that slip into the non-existent past, nor does it have future moments that do not yet exist. The duration of a temporal object can be measured by time, whereas the duration of eternity cannot be measured by time because it transcends time. Anselm makes it clear that the predicate involved—existing as a whole—can be literally said of God and creatures. Creatures exist as a whole at a time and place, and so does God. The difference is that creatures are bound by, or contained in, time and place, whereas God is not. (*Monologion* 22)

For Anselm, to say that God has duration is to say that God exists as a whole at all times and places. Many theologians in the past agree that God exists as a whole at all times and places, and that this is the proper understanding of eternal duration.¹⁶² (We will see in later chapters how this causes problems for divine timelessness.) For instance, the 14th Century philosopher Nicole Oresme notes that there are different kinds of duration. One kind of duration is appropriate to things that endure through

¹⁶¹ Robert Pasnau alludes to this move in his *Metaphysical Themes: 1274-1689* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 397. "Reflection on the nature of permanent [endurant] entities thus reveals that the very most obscure of the traditional divine attributes, eternity, is in fact just the most perfect example of an entirely familiar phenomenon."

¹⁶² For instance, Luis de Molina, *Concordia* IV, Disp. 48.

the successions of time. Another kind of “duration is not successive, but refers to the continuity of everything together and to the things which cannot be altered; it is called eternity.” Further, “of necessity, [this] type is without beginning or end and without succession, but is at once complete as a whole; and this is the duration of God.” This eternal duration of God’s is “without past or future, completely in the present: Because neither any moment of past time is lost nor any anticipation of the future. And this is called the moment of eternity.”¹⁶³ At this point one might ask, ‘is this a legitimate use of duration?’

Samuel Clarke says no. He claims that the schoolmen see eternity not as a real duration, but as a point or instant, “wherein all things are really coexistent at once.” This, he says, is unintelligible and of no use to religion.¹⁶⁴ “The true notion of divine eternity does not consist in making past things to be still present and things future to be already come, which is an express contradiction.” By Clarke’s day there was a particular misinterpretation of Thomas Aquinas that said all things exist simultaneously in eternity. This will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, what must be understood is that Clarke is here offering a standard rejection of this view. He then goes on to make a common, and much needed, clarification. Not all moments of time exist in God’s eternal duration. Only the present moment of time co-exists with eternity. Instead, God has a perfect knowledge of all things such that they are “represented to him in one single thought or view, and all things present and future be

¹⁶³ Nicole Oresme, *Le Livre du ciel et du monde* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 163-5. Also, Turretin, *Institutes Volume 1*, 204. “Time and eternity are not related to each other as part and whole, but as species of duration mutually opposed. Eternity always was and will be. However, time neither always was nor always will be, but will cease with the world.”

¹⁶⁴ John Tillotson concurs with Clarke. See his, *The Remaining Discourses on the Attributes of God* (London: Rofe and Crown, 1700), 359-68. As does Pierre Gassendi, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana, or, A Fabrick of Science Natural, Upon the Hypothesis of Atoms founded by Epicurus, Repaired by Petrus Gassendus, Augmented by Walter Charleton* (London: Tho. Newcomb, 1654), 80.

as absolutely under his power and direction as if there were really no succession at all, and as if all things had been (not that they really are) actually present at once.”¹⁶⁵

Clarke’s complaint is not against predicating ‘duration’ of God’s eternity. His complaint seems to be twofold. First, God’s eternal duration is being abused in order to posit an absurd notion that all of time is literally and concretely simultaneous with eternity. Secondly, ‘duration’ is not being used accurately. Clarke is a defender of the absolute theory of time. Time can exist without change. Time, for Clarke, just is duration. For Clarke, eternal duration just is that which makes time exist; God is the ground of time. His complaint is not over whether or not God has duration, but over how time and duration are to be properly understood. As he sees it, when people deny absolute time—duration—and say that God is a point, they are basically denying that God exists.¹⁶⁶ Of course, Clarke is not a defender of divine timelessness for he believes that God does undergo succession and is temporally extended. Perhaps one might complain that Clarke cannot be called upon to help us gain clarity on the notion of atemporal duration.

Several contemporary philosophers also find the notion of atemporal duration otiose. Katherin Rogers maintains that the medieval philosophers held that God’s eternity does not involve duration. Instead, they see eternity as unextended much like the point in the center of a circle. Putting historical considerations aside, she argues that eternity simply cannot have duration. “Since ‘duration’ ordinarily means ‘extension in time’, a ‘timeless duration’ is, *prima facie*, quite a puzzling notion.”¹⁶⁷

William Lane Craig notes that duration is “not even applicable to a timeless being in

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138.

¹⁶⁶ Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, 114-6.

¹⁶⁷ Katherin Rogers, “Eternity Has No Duration,” *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), 6.

any literal sense...[because a] timeless being does not literally endure at all.”¹⁶⁸ If divine eternity lacks temporal extension, as stated above, it is difficult to understand what eternal duration could mean. “Eternity as duration can be described only so long as ‘duration’ is stripped of any meaning by which to distinguish duration from the lack of it.”¹⁶⁹

One would have to strip duration of all of its meaning if she wishes to apply it to a timeless being. Otherwise a direct contradiction follows. Quentin Smith explains.

This notion of atemporal duration strikes me as self-contradictory. A duration by definition is an extension and an extension by definition has parts. If this be denied, then one is using ‘duration’ to mean its *opposite*, and an unextended and simple instant. Now the parts of a duration, by definition, are sequentially ordered as earlier or later. If this be denied, and it is asserted instead that its parts are simultaneous, then one is again using ‘duration’ to mean its opposite, an unextended instant... Thus to affirm unblushingly of the divine being that it not only has an infinitely extended duration but also is such that there is no earlier or later within its life is to embrace a straightforward contradiction.¹⁷⁰

Anselm would disagree. He thinks there is a literal usage of ‘duration’ that applies to God and creatures—existing as a whole. Need we say that ‘existing as a whole’ is equivalent to duration? A classical theologian wishes to say that God exists as a whole because God is simple, and because God exists at every time and place by causally sustaining every time and place in existence. One could say that a simple God exists as a whole without also saying that God has atemporal duration. What about divine sustaining? I will argue later that a timeless God cannot causally sustain a presentist world. Rogers, Craig, and Smith all agree on this point. Perhaps that is one reason why they reject atemporal duration. When one reads thinkers like Anselm, Molina, or Malebranche, they use eternal duration to speak of God existing at all times by sustaining all times. They are quick to say we should not think of this in a

¹⁶⁸ William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity: The Coherence of Theism II* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 11-12.

¹⁶⁹ Rogers, “Eternity Has No Duration,” 12.

¹⁷⁰ Quentin Smith, “A New Typology of Temporal and Atemporal Permanence,” *Nous* 23 (1989), 323.

temporal way, but they keep the concept of duration directly connected to existing as a whole at all times. As such, they have not given it an adequate non-temporal reading which brings us back to the main reason for rejecting eternal duration. The notion of duration involves temporal extension, and this is the very thing classical theologians wish to deny of God. It seems that duration has not been stripped of all its temporal meaning.¹⁷¹ As such, to say that God has atemporal duration involves a contradiction.

At this point one might try to avoid the contradiction by adopting the doctrine of analogy—a thesis on religious language. Perhaps one might say that ‘duration’ is not being used univocally when predicated of God and creatures. Instead it is being used analogically. The difficulty with this is that analogical predication only works when one has an idea of the determinate predicate that applies to God and the different but closely related determinate predicate that applies to creatures. For instance, a standard example is the predicate ‘wise.’ One can say that ‘God is wise’ and ‘Socrates is wise.’ Someone who believes in the doctrine of analogy will then say that ‘wise’ is not being used univocally of God and Socrates here because God is wise in a different way. Socrates has wisdom contingently by participating in it. Given divine simplicity, God has wisdom necessarily by being identical to wisdom and being the source of all wisdom.¹⁷² In this example we have a clear understanding of how ‘wise’ is being used in each instance. We can also see how each usage is related. If there were no similarity between the usages, we could not say they are analogical

¹⁷¹ John Marenbon discusses how the medievals struggle to hold divine timelessness and eternal duration. See his “Eternity,” in ed. A.S. McGrade, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁷² It is difficult to motivate the doctrine of analogy without divine simplicity. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* 31-35 Aquinas’ justification for analogy is explicitly dependent on divine simplicity. Elsewhere, I have offered a refutation of divine simplicity, and as such I can find no motivation for holding the doctrine of analogy. See my, “Simply Impossible: A Case Against Divine Simplicity,” *The Journal of Reformed Theology* (forthcoming).

because they would be equivocal. It is not clear how this similarity avoids univocity, but I shall set that issue aside.¹⁷³

The type of similarity needed for analogy does not seem to be available with ‘duration.’ If one has to strip duration of all its meaning in order to predicate it of the divine, she will have no content left in the predication. She will be left with an empty predicate for God and a determinate predicate for creatures. That would not be analogical predication. Instead it would be equivocation or simply unintelligibility. As such there would be no reason to predicate it of God.

There seem to be four options left for predicating ‘duration’ of God. First, keep duration’s temporal baggage and predicate it of God. This would make God temporal, so a defender of divine timelessness will not be able to make this move. Second, give up the notion of atemporal duration. Third, try to offer a legitimate non-temporal account of duration. That appears to be a tall order. Fourth, continue to predicate ‘duration’ of God, but when asked what this means simply say that it is an ineffable mystery that one cannot pry into.

The fourth option may be attractive for some, but I would not recommend it for it leaves us with no positive understanding of God’s eternity. As Rogers explains, “Knowing what God is *not* like is insufficient. We are supposed to love God, and as Augustine always says, you cannot love what you do not know. Some attempt to grasp the nature of divine eternity ought to be made, even if the understanding of the temporal creature must fall far short of the reality of God.”¹⁷⁴ Further, if ‘duration’ is an ineffable mystery when predicated of God, this would not give us analogical predication. It would be equivocation at best, but more likely mere

¹⁷³ Thomas Williams, “The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutory,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2005), 578-80.

¹⁷⁴ Rogers, “Eternity Has No Duration,” 14.

unintelligible jargon. The best option for divine timelessness is to give up any notion of duration.¹⁷⁵

To sum up the discussion thus far we can start to see what divine eternity looks like. It has no beginning and no end. It lacks succession and change, and contains no before and after. It lacks temporal extension, location, and duration.

One might wonder how someone like Augustine and Rogers can believe in divine timelessness since they hold that we cannot love what we do not know. The doctrine of divine eternity appears to be a list of negations. What must be understood is that not all negative statements about God are created equal. Some negative statements about God give us a determinate predication while others do not. For instance, to say that ‘God is not wicked’ is indeterminate. It does not give us a clue what God is actually like for God could be ‘morally ambiguous’ or ‘a pretty good guy who has made a few mistakes in the past’ or ‘contingently good’ or ‘necessarily good.’ To say that ‘God is immutable’ is determinate. It narrows the field of other possible predicates considerably. The same seems to be the case with ‘God is timeless.’ The predicate involved is a negation but it gives us a determinate predicate, and thus has positive content.¹⁷⁶

Can We Talk About Eternity?

This might seem to be a bizarre question at first. Haven’t I been talking about eternity this entire time? Obviously yes. The question that I am getting at is with regard to our ability to predicate things of God and talk about His actions. My intent

¹⁷⁵ Helm, *Eternal God*, 36-40.

¹⁷⁶ Most theologians from Augustine’s day and after take predicates like incorruptible to be positive attributes. See William E. Mann, “Duns Scotus on Natural and Supernatural Knowledge of God,” in ed. Thomas Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 249. The 19th Century theologian Augustus Strong concurs: some negative divine predicates are also positive like ‘infinite.’ *Systematic Theology: Volume 1 The Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 9.

at this point is not to criticize, but simply to articulate what seems to be the best account available to divine timelessness. Christian theologians constantly make claims about God's eternal decrees, will, action, and self-determination. For instance, God eternally willed salvation through Christ. When did God will this? One could say, "before time," but that would be a rather unfortunate and confusing statement since the "before" implies a before and after relation. A timeless God cannot have a before and after relation. Instead, one must answer that eternity itself is when God willed. How is this to be understood?

Brian Leftow offers a helpful account. The eternal present functions logically as a date in that one can index propositions to it.¹⁷⁷ "It seems to me that a term x functions literally as a date-term if a sentence is true which has the form 'proposition p tenselessly-is true at x , and due to this, at t , p was already true.'"¹⁷⁸ This is meant to help us understand predications of God, divine actions, and so on. It is also supposed to help us answer a question: when does God exist?

A common objection to divine timelessness is to ask when God exists. It seems obvious to say that God exists now.¹⁷⁹ Yet, if one were to respond this way she would be relegating God to time. If God exists now, He is temporal. If God exists at a time, He is in time. God would have temporal location, and such a thing is inconsistent with (4). Leftow's treatment of eternity as a date is intended in part to circumvent objections like these. The idea is that we should treat eternity like a time

¹⁷⁷ Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 54.

¹⁷⁸ Leftow, "The Eternal Present," in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 41. Peter Lombard does not have available the analytic tools Leftow uses, but Lombard is up to a similar move. In *Sentences* I, Dist. VIII.1 he says that it is permissible to speak of God using tensed verbs, but the best way to understand God is to use "is." The "is" is best because it does not "distinguish temporal movements" in God. Instead, it denotes that God "simply exists."

¹⁷⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God and Time," *Philosophia Christi* 2 (2000), 8. "God exists now. That is to say: God exists at this present time. And if something exists at a time, that is sufficient for it to be *in* time." Also, Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), chapter 1.

that is discrete from our own.¹⁸⁰ This discrete time would serve as the truthmaker for our claims about God.¹⁸¹ One can say that God exists in eternity, or at eternity, or simply that God exists. One can say that from eternity God willed to save humanity through Jesus, or that God eternally decreed the defeat of evil.

Again, it would be good to sum up what we have covered so far. Necessarily, God's timeless eternity means that God exists without beginning, without end, and without succession. It lacks any before and after. It is not temporally extended, nor does it have temporal location. Eternity does not have duration. A timeless God cannot undergo any intrinsic or extrinsic changes. Further, as simple God is pure act, and has no properties, nor is He subject to any distinctions be they real or conceptual. Finally, eternity logically functions as a date or "time" that is discrete from our own time-series.

Concluding Remarks

Divine timelessness, immutability, and simplicity have traditionally been justified on the basis of perfect being theology. Unfortunately space does not allow for a detailed discussion of the method of perfect being theology. For now it will suffice to say that the end result of perfect being theology is to predicate of God perfections that He has necessarily.¹⁸² For instance, it is better to be good necessarily than contingently. When it comes to understanding God's eternity it must be noted that Christians who hold to the divine timeless research program see timelessness,

¹⁸⁰ Leftow, "Eternity and Immutability" in ed. William E. Mann *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 59.

¹⁸¹ Leftow, "The Eternal Present," in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 42.

¹⁸² Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991). Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Brian Leftow, "Why Perfect Being Theology?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69 (2011).

immutability and simplicity as perfections. As such, God is held to be necessarily timeless, immutable, and simple. Necessarily God exists without beginning, without end, without succession, without temporal location and extension. Necessarily God can suffer no change. Necessarily God is pure act and has no potential and no properties. These are strong statements, and their strength is not always appreciated in contemporary discussions. This may be why some theologians and philosophers continue to look for a third way between divine atemporality and temporality. The method of perfect being theology, however, brings us to the conclusion that either temporality or atemporality are perfections. As such, there is little sense in claims that God is timeless sans creation but temporal with creation. If God is timeless, He is necessarily timeless. It is not possible for Him to become temporal for that would involve the possibility of change in God, and this is not something that timelessness allows for. God must either be necessarily timeless or necessarily temporal. The traditional understanding is that God is necessarily timeless.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTISM, OMNISCIENCE, AND THE TIMELESS GOD

In this chapter I shall attempt to do several things. First, I shall argue that the classical tradition is the presentist tradition. In other words, classical theists were presentists. This is important to know when it comes to critiquing their research program on God and time. Second, I will look at one particular objection to divine timelessness from presentism: it is incompatible with omniscience.

Presentism and Classical Theology

Presentism and endurantism are the traditional views amongst Christian theologians throughout Church history.¹⁸³ In fact, one of the main reasons given for thinking that God is timeless, based upon the incompleteness of temporal life, assumes both presentism and endurantism. Yet, there are a few issues that have come to the fore in contemporary debates. Does four-dimensionalism need to be true in order for God to be omniscient? Is four-dimensionalism needed in order to make sense of the claim that all times are present for God in eternity? These are interesting questions that one will need to address in her research program. For now I want to focus on a question that sometimes arises out of these two previous questions. Is four-dimensionalism the view that classical theologians meant to articulate? The answer is no. Far too many contemporary theologians and philosophers either accuse or praise classical theologians for holding to four-dimensionalism, but this is anachronistic.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ One possible exception could be John Wycliffe who appears to have posited the existence of the past and the future along with the present. See Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes: 1274-1689* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 388-90. Pasnau notes that, unlike most in the tradition, Wycliffe believes that God's omniscience and eternity entail that past, present, and future are all on an ontological par.

¹⁸⁴ A sampling of such claims can be found in the following. Katherin Rogers, "Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God." *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (January 2007). Rogers, "Back

Presentism “was believed by everyone, both the philosophers and the folk, until at least the nineteenth century; it is written into the grammar of every natural language; and it is still assumed in everyday life, even by philosophers who officially deny it.”¹⁸⁵

In the previous chapter I noted the tight connection between presentism, edurantism and the doctrine of divine timelessness—i.e. God exists all at once in a timeless present that lacks a before and after. In this section I will further show that presentism is the classical Christian position. This will become even clearer in the next chapter on presentism, creation and divine timelessness, but before we can delve into those issues it will be helpful to see how deeply ingrained presentism is in Christian thought. One example comes from Gregory of Nyssa. In a rather poetic fashion he says, “time’s lapse sweeps away with it all existence in the past, whereas expected existence gains substance from our hope.” (*Against Eunomius* I.42) Statements like these only make sense on presentism. Several misreadings and misinterpretations of classical texts need to be dispelled before we can begin to critique the classical position on divine timelessness.

From Augustine’s *Confessions* to Duns Scotus’ *Lectura*, presentism and edurantism have been widely held. For the medieval theologians, both God and

to Eternalism: A Response to Leftow’s ‘Anselmian Presentism’,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009). Christopher Conn, “Anselmian Spacetime: Omnipresence and the Created Order,” *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011). Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus on Eternity and Timelessness,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997). However, Cross recants his claim in *Duns Scotus on God* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), chapter 8. Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time, 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 14. Hans Kraml, “Eternity in Process Philosophies,” in eds. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier, *God, Eternity, and Time* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011). William Lane Craig, “Time and Eternity,” in ed. Melville Y. Stewart, *Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 686.

¹⁸⁵ John Bigelow, “Presentism and Properties,” *Nous* 30 (1996), 35. See also Dean Zimmerman, “The A-Theory of Time, Presentism, and Open Theism,” in ed. Melville Y. Stewart, *Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 793.

creatures are enduring beings that exist wholly and entirely at the present.¹⁸⁶ It should be noted, however, that medieval thinkers' claim that God's eternal present is different from the creaturely present (as discussed in chapter 3).¹⁸⁷ Yet they think God's present is similar enough to our present to warrant the predication *present*. The assumption of presentism is at work in their descriptions of God's timeless eternity and how it relates to our temporal present.

The Catholic and Protestant scholastics also held that God was an enduring being whose eternity coexists with all times.¹⁸⁸ Their view is not that all created times coexist as the four-dimensionalist sees it. As the Protestant scholastic Francis Turretin explains, all times coexist with eternity without being coexistent with each other. "Thus the past, while it was, coexisted with eternity, the present now coexists with it, and the future will coexist with it."¹⁸⁹ Turretin is clearly holding to presentism here.

As noted above, there are theologians who are often called upon by the four-dimensionalist or accused of holding to four-dimensionalism. There are passages in Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas that appear to point in the direction of four-dimensionalism. I think this is mistaken, though it is a matter of contemporary dispute. The contemporary confusion seems to derive from the claim that all moments

¹⁸⁶ See Robert Pasnau, "On Existing All at Once," in *God, Eternity, and Time*. Also, Anselm, *Proslogion* 13. Augustine, *Confessions* XI. For a discussion of Augustine's puzzles over the present see Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1983), 29-32. J.R. Lucas offers a critique of some of Augustine's puzzles about the present. See Lucas, *A Treatise on Time and Space* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1973), chapter 4.

¹⁸⁷ Boethius, *Trinity is One God Not Three Gods*, IV.

¹⁸⁸ See Pasnau, "On Existing All at Once," in *God, Eternity, and Time*. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics vol. 3: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 345-64. Also, Garrett J. DeWeese's *God and the Nature of Time* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004) contains a good historical treatment of divine eternity and the metaphysics of time. One can even find similar statements about God's duration in Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, V.6.

¹⁸⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Volume 1* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992), 203.. See also Stephen Charnocke, *Several Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Newman, 1682), 186.

of time are present to God in eternity.¹⁹⁰ What must be understood is that the classical theologians in the middle ages as well as scholastics and Protestants believe that God's knowledge is not dependent upon creatures. Their claim that all moments of time exist in eternity must be understood in light of this belief as well as their continual endorsement of presentism. With these two commitments in mind we can begin to understand the classical position.

In *Confessions* XI.17, Augustine is trying to figure out how one could see the future in order to prophesy given that the future does not yet exist. In XI.18 he claims the future itself is not seen, but perhaps the signs or causes of presently existing objects are seen. Ultimately he leaves it as a mystery at this point. In other writings, however, he is clearer. In *On the Trinity* 6.11 he says, "created things are not known by God because they have been made; it is rather the case that they have been made because they are immutably known by him." In *On Genesis* 5.6 he says that God knows all things before He creates them, "they were in God's knowledge, they were not in their own nature." Peter Lombard adds to this that this is the way God knows things even after He creates them. (*Sentences* Book I, Dist. XXXV 9.1-2). In *City of God* XI.21 Augustine explains that God's cognition is not like ours in that God does not "look forward to the future, see the present, and look back upon the past." Instead,

God's mind does not pass from one thought to another. His vision is utterly unchangeable. Thus, He comprehends all that takes place in time—the not-yet-existing future, the existing present, and the no-longer-existing past—in an immutable and eternal present... His knowledge of what happens in time, like His movement of what changes in time, is completely independent of time.

¹⁹⁰ Another source of confusion that seems to be present during the 1980's and 90's is over the tensed vs. tenseless theory of time debate. It seems that some have confused medieval claims about eternal truths with the tenseless theory of time and its alleged ontological entailments. Others seem to have mistakenly assumed that since a particular medieval thinker clearly held to a tensed theory of time (e.g. Scotus), then he must hold to divine temporalism since timelessness is not compatible with tensed time. This is one reason why I do not find the tensed vs. tenseless debate to be helpful for discussing God and time.

Boethius continues to work out these Augustinian ideas. As Boethius' *Consolations of Philosophy* makes clear, "how absurd it is that we should say that the result of temporal affairs is the cause of eternal foreknowledge!" (V.147) For Boethius, "All that lives under the conditions of time moves through the present from the past to the future." (V.161) Elsewhere he speaks of the "now that flows away" that makes time.¹⁹¹ Boethius continually makes the claim that all moments of time exist for God in His eternal now, but he does so with a careful qualification. "Since then all judgment apprehends the subjects of its thought according to its own nature, and God has a condition of ever-present eternity, His knowledge, which passes over every change of time, embracing infinite lengths of past and future, views in its own direct comprehension everything *as though* it were taking place in the present." (V.163)¹⁹² What is Boethius saying here?

As John Marenbon explains, Boethius is making a claim about the mode of God's knowledge.¹⁹³ Everything has a mode of knowledge appropriate to its own nature. The mode of God's knowledge is not based on created things. Instead, it is based on a perfect knowledge of the divine nature. To say that all times exist in the eternal present is to make an epistemic claim and not a claim about the ontology of time. It is not a claim that all times are literally present in eternity. God cannot "see" the future because the future does not exist. God knows the future truths by having a perfect knowledge of Himself.

Anselm speaks in multiple places like a presentist. He speaks of "what has had a past existence but does not now exist, and a future existence but does not yet exist." (*Proslogion* 22) Yet in *Proslogion* 20 through 21 Anselm says things that sound like

¹⁹¹As quoted by Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* I.Q10.objection 1.

¹⁹² Emphasis mine.

¹⁹³ Marenbon, "Boethius," in eds. Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis, *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion Volume 2: Medieval Philosophy of Religion* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2009), 22-30.

four-dimensional eternalism. It would be anachronistic, however, to read this passage as a commitment to four-dimensional eternalism. Anselm is working with a distinction in medieval philosophy between permanent and successive entities, and this distinction assumes presentism and endurantism. Permanent entities endure through time, but their lives can be conceptually divided into successive states or temporal parts. These temporal parts are not extramental four-dimensional objects. They are conceptual divisions. (One may recall this discussion from chapter 3, and the role it played in articulating divine timelessness.) The basic thrust of his argument is that existing as a whole, or all at once (endurance), is a perfection found in creatures. As such, God must have this perfection and be an enduring permanent being.

Another source of confusion in Anselm comes from *De Concordia* I.5.¹⁹⁴ Here Anselm uses his presentism to articulate his doctrine of eternity. Eternity has “no past or future but only a present.” If Anselm were a four-dimensionalist, it would make little sense to continually make comparisons between our temporal present and God’s eternal present as he does. But the passage goes on to say that

although in eternity there is only a present, nevertheless it is not a temporal present as ours is, only an eternal one in which all periods of time are contained. Indeed, just as our present time envelops every place and whatever is in every place, so in the eternal present all time is encompassed along with whatever exists at any time.

Anselm even says that all times “exist simultaneously in an eternal present” which is why some think that Anselm is a four-dimensional eternalist. However, I believe this to be a mistake because it ignores Anselm’s continual commitment to presentism. He is talking about God’s knowledge and foreknowledge when He makes this claim. One of the problems for God’s foreknowledge that Anselm is trying to address here is that our actions and behaviors themselves are not everlasting because they do not always

¹⁹⁴ Rogers, “Back to Eternalism,” 324. She uses this passage to support the claim that Anselm was a four-dimensionalist.

exist. How does God foreknow them if they do not always exist? This problem arises on presentism and not on four-dimensional eternalism. If Anselm were a four-dimensionalist he would not have this problem. His solution to the problem is consistent with the presentism that he explicitly endorses elsewhere. Anselm's move in this chapter is that all *truths* about the past, present, and future exist in eternity immutably. It does not matter that the actions themselves do not exist in eternity. All that matters is that the truths exist. This is not a commitment to four-dimensionalism. It is a throwback to an Augustinian commitment to the eternity of truth.

Thomas Aquinas has been accused by process theists of holding to four-dimensionalism.¹⁹⁵ Again, this is a mistake. Aquinas clearly speaks of the movable now (*Summa Theologiae* I.Q10.a4). Yet, Aquinas also uses the metaphor of a man in a watchtower to explain God's foreknowledge.¹⁹⁶ The metaphor seems to indicate that God sees all moments of time simultaneously just as a man in a watchtower sees the whole of the land simultaneously. However, Aquinas does not intend this to imply that the past, present, and future are on an ontological par, though some have claimed this of Aquinas in order to condemn him or put him on the side of four-dimensional eternalism. Aquinas is a presentist.¹⁹⁷ In *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate* QII.12 he writes of future contingents coming into existence. "Although a contingent is not determined as long as it is, future, yet, as soon as it is produced in the realm of nature, it has a determinate truth. It is in this way that the gaze of divine knowledge is brought upon it." And a little later on he says, "Although a contingent does not exercise an act of existence as long as it is a future, as soon as it is present it has both existence and truth, and in this condition stands under the divine vision." The idea in

¹⁹⁵ Hans Kraml, "Eternity in Process Philosophies," in *God, Eternity, and Time*.

¹⁹⁶ DeWesse, *God and the nature of Time*, 157.

¹⁹⁷ Kevin Staley, "Omniscience, Time, and Eternity: Is Aquinas Inconsistent?" *Saint Anselm Journal* 3 (2006), 9.

both of these statements is that future things do not exist as concrete objects until they become present. Aquinas goes on to say of God's omniscience in *De Veritate* QII.12

although God's knowledge does not change but always remains the same, the condition according to which a thing is referred to His knowledge does not always remain the same with respect to that knowledge. For a thing is related to God's knowledge as it is in its own present existence, yet present existence does not always belong to it. Hence, we can consider the thing either together with its condition of being present or without it, and, consequently, we can consider it either in the manner in which it is referred to God's knowledge or in some other manner.

Aquinas is endorsing presentism here. Even further, in QII.7-13 he considers several objections to God's omniscience and immutability. Several of the objections assume presentism. For instance, one objection goes like this: is it not the case that God's knowledge changes from past, to present, to future? At one time, God knew that <Christ will be born>, but now God no longer knows this. Instead, God knows that <Christ was born>. Another objection looks like this. A thing exists, then no longer exists. Can God know when something exists now? God's knowledge of Himself cannot deliver knowledge of what currently exists.

Aquinas' response is telling. He never rejects presentism, but instead assumes it as does the objection. In fact, he assumes presentism throughout the rest of the treatise to explicate various issues. (The same is true in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.63 and following.) What Aquinas contends is that God's knowledge does not change because of the divine mode of knowing. God's knowledge is based upon a perfect knowledge of His own essence. It is not that God looks upon the world and sees what is presently occurring, and thus has something added to His knowledge. God already knows everything perfectly through knowledge of Himself. All truths are thus represented to God through His own essence. God knows the representation of things, and not the concrete particulars. (*De Veritate* QII.13, 1.) In *De Veritate* QII.14 he makes this explicit. "It cannot be said, however, that what is known by God is the

cause of His knowledge; for things are temporal and His knowledge is eternal, and what is temporal cannot be the cause of anything eternal.”

Aquinas’ defense is that God’s knowledge is not based on the ever changing temporal world. He concedes that if this were the case, God’s knowledge would in fact change. However, God’s knowledge is based on His own immutable essence, and as such, cannot change.

Another objection that Aquinas considers will further help make this issue come into focus. In *De Veritate* QII.3 he considers the following objection.

“Whatever God knows He knows from eternity, since His knowledge does not vary. Now, whatever He knows is a being, for knowledge is only of being. Hence, whatever He knows existed from eternity. But no creature existed from eternity. Consequently, He knows no creature.” If Aquinas was a four-dimensional eternalist, he could respond by saying that all concrete objects exist eternally in the four-dimensional spacetime manifold. But, Aquinas is not a four-dimensionalist. His response instead is that the objects do not have to exist in order for God to know them. “Although knowledge has only being for its object, it is not necessary that what is known should be a real being at the time in which it is known; for, just as we know things that are distant in place, we also know things distant in time, as is evident from our knowledge of things past. Hence, it is not inconsistent to affirm a knowledge of God that is about things that are not eternal.” (*De Veritate* QII.3.12)

A contemporary four-dimensional eternalist would most likely see this response from Aquinas and say that Aquinas has a grounding problem like every other presentist does with regard to truths about the past and the future. It is not clear to me that the Augustinian move that Aquinas makes here—which grounds these truths in the essence of God—is unable to meet the grounding objection to presentism.

However, arguing this is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is merely worth pointing out that the medieval theologians might have resources for dealing with the grounding objection to presentism from within their own research program.

Back to the present argument. Earlier I noted that process theists accuse Aquinas of holding to four-dimensionalism. Interestingly this criticism is not new. Around the time of Aquinas several theologians critical of his work falsely accused him of holding that eternity was simultaneous with past, present and future as if all times were equally real. After Aquinas' death, certain theologians would argue that Aquinas held this so that they could condemn his views. A few seem to have taken up this line of interpretation and ran with it, but it faced obvious objections early on.¹⁹⁸ For instance, John Duns Scotus felt the need to reject this Thomistic school of thought. The refutation was quite simple. God cannot coexist, or stand in a causal relation, with non-existent things. The present is the only moment of time that exists, so God's eternal now cannot be simultaneously present with the non-existent past and the not-yet existent future.¹⁹⁹ Scotus—like most prior to the 1800's—thinks that presentism is obviously true and formulates his theology accordingly. Further, Scotus continues to affirm the Augustinian line with regard to God's knowledge. God's knowledge is not based on created things, but is based on a perfect understanding of His own essence.²⁰⁰

This confusion persisted throughout the Reformation and Enlightenment. I'm not certain how many people actually—if any—held the view that God's eternity literally contains the past, present and future. My uncertainty that anyone actually

¹⁹⁸ See John Marenbon, "Medieval Metaphysics II: Things, non-things, God and Time," in eds. Robin le Poidevin, Peter Simons, Andrew McGonigal, and Ross P. Cameron, *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 65.

¹⁹⁹ John Duns Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom: Lectura I 39*, translated by A. Vos Jaczn, H. Veldhuis, A.H. Looman-Graaskamp, E. Dekker, and N.W. Den Bok (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 82-6 and 174-8.

²⁰⁰ Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom*, 142ff, and 188.

held this view is due to a particular interpretation of this claim within Thomistic thought. Luis de Molina in *Concordia* IV, Disp. 48 follows one Thomistic tradition that holds that objects exist eternally and temporally. Everything exists in eternity, and in time. There is the concrete Adam that exists in eternity, *and* the concrete Adam that exists in time. Molina goes on to say that this is the view of not only Aquinas, but also Anselm, Boethius, and Augustine. This particular interpretation goes back to the 16th Century Thomistic commentator Cajetan.²⁰¹ The claim wouldn't be that four-dimensionalism is true of time. Instead the claim would be that somehow there are concrete counterparts of ourselves that exist in God's eternal present. This is a bizarre claim, but it does not lend support to four-dimensionalism. The theologians who held this view still thought that a presentist ontology of the temporal order is true.

Again, it is not clear that anyone prior to the 19th Century actually held the view that all times are literally present to God. At the very least, theologians and philosophers felt the need to mention it in order to refute the notion. For instance, in Henry More's *Divine Dialogues* from 1668 a group of individuals are engaged in a dialogue about theology. Hylobares objects to the notion of divine eternity since it entails a contradiction.

That it is an essential presence of all things with God, as well of things past, present, as to come; and that the Duration of God is all of it, as it were, in one steady [*sic*] and permanent... Instant at once... For what can be more contradictory, then that all things should have been really and essentially with God from all Eternity at once, and yet be born in time and succession?²⁰²

Hylobares' dialogue partner Philotheus quickly rebukes Hylobares for being uncharitable. Then Philotheus responds in a similar fashion to that of Scotus.

That the whole Evolution of Times and Ages from everlasting to everlasting is so collectedly and presentifickly [*sic*] represented to God at once, *as if* all things and Actions which ever were, are, or shall be, were at this very Instant,

²⁰¹ See John Marenbon, "Medieval Metaphysics II: Things, non-things, God and Time," in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, 65.

²⁰² More, *Divine Dialogues* (London: James Flesher, 1668), 57-8.

and so always, really present and existent before him...[The divine mind comprehends] the Ideas of all Things and Ages at once in the Intellect of God.²⁰³

The idea is that God comprehends all things in eternity because all things in time are “represented” to God at once. The things themselves do not exist in eternity, just a representation of them. It should also be noted that the representation of things in time maintains the proper temporal topology even though it exists eternally in the mind of God. In other words, from all eternity God knows the order of events that take place in time.²⁰⁴ After hearing all of this Hylobares concedes that his objection has been refuted and says, “I am half ashamed I ever propounded it.”²⁰⁵

In the quote from Philotheus, I emphasized the “as if” clause. The “as if” clause is an important point for clarity on this issue, and it can be found in several other theologians from this time period. A contemporary of Henry More, Stephen Charnocke, stresses the same point. Charnocke, like the dialogue partners in More, holds that God exists without beginning, without end, and without succession. In God’s eternity there is neither flux nor change.²⁰⁶ The things of the world are in time and thus undergo change and succession. This succession does not cause a change in God’s knowledge because God does not see things in time. God’s knowledge is not based on what occurs in time. Instead, God knows all that occurs in time by having a perfect knowledge of Himself. “He doth not know one thing now, and another anon; He sees all things at once.” God still knows the true temporal order of things even though He knows all of this at once.

God knows time, he knows all things as they are in time; He doth not know all things to be at once, though he knows at once what is, has been, and will be. All things are past, present, and to come in regard of their Existence; but there

²⁰³ More, *Divine Dialogues*, 60. Emphasis mine.

²⁰⁴ More, *Divine Dialogues*, 61-70. James Arminius concurs with this as well in his *25 Public Disputations*, Disputation IV.XXXIII-XXXIV.

²⁰⁵ More, *Divine Dialogues*, 72.

²⁰⁶ Charnocke, *Attributes of God*, 182ff.

is not past, present and to come in regard to God's Knowledge of them; because he sees and knows not by any other, but by himself; He is his own Light by which he sees, his own Glass wherein he sees; beholding himself, he beholds all things.²⁰⁷

If one were still uncertain about this, Charnocke drives home the point again.

If God be eternal, he knows all things as present. All things are present to him in his Eternity; for this is the notion of Eternity, to be without succession. If Eternity be one indivisible point, and is not diffused into preceding and succeeding parts, then that which is known in it or by it, is perceived without any succession; For knowledge is as the substance of the person knowing; if that hath various actions and distinct from itself, then it understands things in differences of time as time presents them to view: But, since Gods Being depends not upon the revolutions of time, so neither doth his Knowledge; it exceeds all motions of years and days, comprehends infinite spaces of past and future. God considers all things in his Eternity in one simple knowledge, *as if* they were now acted before him.²⁰⁸

Charnocke's claims here echo those of the medieval theologians, and yet it also contains the "as if" clause that is an important point of clarification in this time period.

In the 18th Century Samuel Clarke also felt the need to address this confusion about the claim that all moments of time exist in eternity, even though he denies divine timelessness.

The true notion of divine eternity does not consist in making past things to be still present and things future to be already come, which is an express contradiction. But it consists in this (and in this it infinitely transcends the manner of existence of all created beings, even of those which shall continue for ever): that whereas their finite minds can by no means comprehend all that is past or understand perfectly the things that are present, much less know or have in their power the things that are to come (but their thoughts and knowledge and power, must of necessity have degrees and periods, and be successive and transient as the things themselves); the eternal, supreme cause, on the contrary, has such a perfect, independent, and unchangeable comprehension of all things that in every point or instant of his eternal duration all things past, present, and to come must be, not indeed themselves present at once (for that is a manifest contradiction), but they must be as entirely known and *represented* to him in one single thought or view, and all things present and future be as absolutely under his power and direction *as if*

²⁰⁷ Charnocke, *Attributes of God*, 186.

²⁰⁸ Charnocke, *Attributes of God*, 192. Emphasis mine.

there were really no succession at all, and *as if* all things had been (not that they really are) actually present at once.²⁰⁹

Clarke's statement here exemplifies the clarity that theologians had been striving for with regard to this issue.

A quick summary is in order before moving on. When the Christian tradition says that all moments are present to God in eternity—at least with regard to God's omniscience—it is not meant to say something about the ontology of time. Rather it is saying something about God's mode of cognition. Namely, that God knows the abstract forms of things from all eternity.²¹⁰ God's mode of cognition is not based upon His perception of times and events, but rather based on His direct apprehension of His own essence. As the medievals' would say, God has a perfect knowledge of Himself and thus knows all things. In this way one can say that all times are present to God in eternity because it is true that from all eternity God knows all abstract states of affairs or all eternal truths. Thus, the tradition did not have four-dimensionalism in view, nor would a classical theologian think four-dimensionalism necessary in order to make sense of God's omniscience.

None of this demonstrates that God's knowledge of the future is in fact possible on presentism. It merely shows that the majority of Christians in the past saw no reason to posit the existence of the future in order to explain God's foreknowledge. If one wishes to argue that classical Christians should have held to four-dimensionalism in order to maintain divine omniscience, one is free to do so. It would be anachronistic to say that classical Christians did believe in four-dimensional eternalism. This is because the majority of Christians in the past were presentists and

²⁰⁹Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138. Emphasis mine. One of Clarke's influences, Pierre Gassendi, affirms the same. See *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana, or, A Fabrick of Science Natural, Upon the Hypothesis of Atoms founded by Epicurus, Repaired by Petrus Gassendus, Augmented by Walter Charleton* (London: Tho. Newcomb, 1654), 81-2.

²¹⁰DeWeese makes a similar point in *God and the Nature of Time*, 132-3.

used presentism to articulate their theological doctrines. They never made statements like, ‘It only appears from our perspective that the present is the only moment that exists, but from the divine perspective all of time exists.’ Instead they make direct inferences from the fact of presentism to claims about God’s eternal present.

Does God’s Knowledge Change with Creation?

As discussed above, there is an obvious objection that arises from the combination of presentism, timelessness, and omniscience, and the objection remains today. In our day it is often argued that a timeless God cannot know what time it is now if presentism is true.²¹¹ The idea is that a timeless God cannot know when it is now since that would require a constant change in God. This objection only works if the research program in view has a particular understanding of omniscience. It seems that some in the classical Christian tradition would not find this argument to be a serious threat to their research program since it assumes that God’s knowledge is based upon the existence of the concrete particulars of creation. Certain classical theologians would see this as a mistake. God, they say, has a perfect knowledge of Himself. His knowledge is in no way dependent upon creatures. I will call this the *Augustinian Option*. Another strand of classical theologians takes this argument seriously since they hold that God does in fact have knowledge of the present. I will call this the *Thomist Option*.

²¹¹ William Lane Craig, “Divine Eternity,” in ed. Thomas P Flint and Michael C. Rea, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 159-60. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring About God: Selected Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 150-2. John Philoponus seems to have offered this argument against Proclus. See his *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World 12-18*, translated by James Wilberding (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2006), 74-81. Interestingly, divine temporalists from the 17th and 18th Century like Samuel Clarke, Pierre Gassendi, and Thomas Hobbes, did not offer this objection. They seem to agree with what I shall call the Augustinian position.

The Augustinian Option

As stated above, this group of theologians holds that God knows all things that occur in time, but His knowledge is not based upon the temporal objects.²¹² With human persons, we gain knowledge when new events occur in time. Not so with God. “God does not see in time, nor does anything new happen in his sight or his knowledge when some temporal and transitory action is performed.” (Augustine, *The Trinity* XII.10) Human persons can only experience things one moment at a time. The divine persons of the Trinity, however, see everything “all at once, not bit by bit.” (Augustine, *The Trinity* XV.23)

Augustine distinguishes divine and human ways of knowing as follows. He holds that human persons acquire beliefs in three basic ways. First, we can know things through self-perception or knowing ourselves. We can reflect on ourselves, our own consciousness, and come to know a whole host of things like <I am alive> and <I want to be happy>. Second, we come to know things through bodily sensations or bodily perceptions. We can look around and see trees and thus know that <there are trees near us>. Third, we come to know things by testimony. Augustine points out that most of our beliefs are dependent upon the testimony of others. Through testimony we come to know that other places and people exist, we learn history and daily news, and we learn about our birth and parents. (*The Trinity* XV.3.21)

When it comes to God’s knowledge, Augustine says that we do not hold that God knows things through the testimony of others or through bodily perception. Instead God knows all things by having a perfect knowledge of Himself. God is simple so His wisdom is His knowledge which is also His substance. How does this

²¹² This is also the position of the dialogue partners in Nicholas Malebranches’ *Dialogues on Metaphysics*, dialogue 8. Also, Charnocke, *Attributes of God*, 185-6, and 192. In our day Edward Wierenga seems to be defending a thesis similar to this. See his “Omniscience and Time, One More Time: A Reply to Craig,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004).

shed light on our question? It seems that a timeless God cannot know when it is now nor what presently exists. Augustine would not find this as a reason for rejecting divine timelessness because He thinks such knowledge is unnecessary for omniscience. God does not know created things “because they are, but that they are because he knows them. He was not ignorant of what he was going to create. Nor did he know them as created otherwise than as to be created; nothing accrued to his wisdom from them, but when they came into existence as required, it remained just as it had been.” (*The Trinity* XV.22)

The Forms or Ideas exist in the mind of God. Since God is simple, His mind is identical to Himself. God has a perfect knowledge of Himself and all that He can create and will create. Augustine in *The Trinity* VI.11 claims that

the almighty and wise God [is] full of all the living and unchanging ideas, which are all one in it, as it is one from the one with whom it is one. In this art God knows all things that he has made through it, and so when times come and go, nothing comes and goes for God’s knowledge. For all these created things around us are not known by God because they have been made; it is rather, surely, that even changeable things have been made because they are unchangeably known by him.

Creation adds nothing to God’s knowledge for He already had, or rather eternally has, a perfect knowledge of everything. (Lombard, *Sentences*, I Dist. XXXV.) God does not need to know what time it is now, nor does He need to know what objects presently exist. Knowing such things would not add to His knowledge, or so say the Augustinians. (Lombard, *Sentences*, I, Dist. XXXIX)²¹³ In fact, knowing such things would be considered an imperfection because such knowledge would entail (i) that God’s knowledge is in some way dependent upon the created temporal order, and (ii) God would have succession in His life. For the atemporalist, temporality entails imperfection.

²¹³ Cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 66.

As noted before, the atemporalist who holds this view will not find it a threat that God does not know what time it is now. This objection to divine timelessness only has force for those who believe that God has knowledge of things in time. The temporalist will need to argue that God cannot be omniscient unless He knows what time it is now. In other words, she will have to argue that the Augustinian option is not a solid auxiliary theory within the timeless research program. Interestingly, the Thomistic school argued that God cannot be omniscient unless He is aware of things in time. As such, we will see that they are subject to this objection.

The Thomist Option

Aquinas' position is somewhat different. Just like the Augustinians, Aquinas agrees that God's knowledge is not based upon temporal things. In *De Veritate* QII.14 he writes, "It cannot be said, however, that what is known by God is the cause of His knowledge; for things are temporal and His knowledge is eternal, and what is temporal cannot be the cause of anything eternal." He agrees that God's knowledge is first and *per se* of Himself. God knows all things by having a perfect timeless knowledge of Himself.²¹⁴ (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 45-54) If one has a perfect knowledge of a cause, she will have a perfect knowledge of its effect. God is the cause of all things, so He has a perfect knowledge of all things by knowing the cause of all things—i.e. Himself. Since God's power is His essence, given divine simplicity, He has a perfect knowledge of all that He can produce. Further, God is pure act, so He has a perfect knowledge of what He produces. All truths are thus represented to God through His own essence. God knows the representation of things, and not the

²¹⁴ See also Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, VII.

concrete particulars. (*De Veritate* QII.13, 1.) This is what the Thomists call *natural knowledge*.²¹⁵

Where Aquinas seems to disagree with the Augustinians is over God's knowledge of concrete particulars. Whereas the Augustinians held that God does not have knowledge of what occurs in time, Aquinas argues that God in fact does. Why? One reason is that humans have knowledge of concrete particulars that occur in time. God's cognitive power is greater than humans, so He must have this knowledge too. If God is perfect in knowledge, He must have knowledge of these things. Otherwise He would be foolish. (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.65)

In several places Aquinas deals with an objection to God's omniscience from concrete particulars, or as he would say, singulars. Earlier I noted an objection in *De Veritate* QII.7 that looks like this. A thing exists, then no longer exists. Can God know when something exists now? God's knowledge of Himself cannot deliver knowledge of what currently exists. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.63 one of the objections goes as follows. "[S]ingulars are not always. Either therefore they are always known by God, or they are known at one time and unknown at another. The first is impossible, since about what is not there can be no knowledge, which is always about true things, and things which are not cannot be true. The second is also impossible, because the knowledge of the divine intellect is altogether unchangeable." The problem underlying both of these objections is that concrete particulars only exist at the present. In the first objection, the difficulty is whether God can know what currently exists without undergoing change. In the second, the difficulty is against the very possibility of an immutable God knowing concrete particulars because they only exist at the present.

²¹⁵ Thomas P. Flint, "Two Accounts of Providence," in ed. Michael C. Rea, *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume II: Providence, Scripture, and Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.

Aquinas could affirm, like most before him, that God's knowledge consists only of Himself and the representations of things, not of the concrete particulars themselves. Thus, God's immutable knowledge would not need to undergo any change by knowing the concrete particulars. But Aquinas is not content with this. He wishes to go further and say that "the divine knowledge extends to singulars as existing in themselves." (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.66) How can he do this? The strategy seems to be twofold. First, appeal to natural knowledge. God has a perfect knowledge of everything by knowing Himself, the cause of everything. By this knowledge God can know all things that exist and that do not exist. Second, by *knowledge of vision* God knows what currently or presently exists. Let us take each in turn.

With regard to the first move, one of the issues is about God's knowledge of non-existent things. For instance, the future does not yet exist. Can God's natural knowledge deliver knowledge of non-existents? Aquinas says yes. An astronomer can know a future eclipse before it happens. A craftsman can know what he will make even before he has made it because the craftsman has knowledge of what he—the cause—will do. The idea is that God too has this knowledge, but in a perfect way. God is the cause of all, so by knowing Himself He has a perfect representation of every effect. (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.66) Yet, it would appear that this is not sufficient to give God knowledge of what presently exists in such a way that God will remain immutable, hence the need for the second strategy, the appeal to knowledge of vision.

How can God have a timeless knowledge of the concrete particulars that exist in time? His answer is that the present moment of time syncs up with eternity such

that God's knowledge of vision provides God knowledge of what currently exists.²¹⁶ He explains as follows. "There is no succession in God's act of understanding, any more than there is in His existence. Hence it is all at once everlasting, which belongs to the essence of eternity, whereas the duration of time is drawn out by the succession of before and after." Now "since the being of the eternal never fails, eternity synchronizes with every time or instant of time," much like the point of the circumference of a circle.

Accordingly whatever exists in any part of time, is coexistent with the eternal as though present thereto, although in relation to another part of time it is present or future. Now a thing cannot be present to, and coexistent with, the eternal, except with the whole eternal, since this has no successive duration. Therefore whatever happens throughout the whole course of time *is seen as present* by the divine intellect in its eternity. *And yet that which is done in some part of time was not always in existence.* It remains therefore that God has knowledge of those things which are not as yet in relation to the course of time. (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.66)²¹⁷

A quick comment is in order before proceeding with Aquinas' solution. Some might misinterpret this passage as a commitment to four-dimensional eternalism because it states that God has knowledge of all moments of time. As argued above, Christians have not traditionally been fond of this idea. What must be understood is that this statement from Aquinas is made in the middle of a chapter called "That God Knows the Things That Are Not." One of the main issues is how God can know non-existent things like the past and the future. After he states the argument from which the above quote is taken, he concludes that God knows "not-beings" or non-existent things. Further, in the next chapter, 67, he states, "the vision of the divine intellect from eternity sees each thing that happens in time *as though it were present*, as we have shown above."²¹⁸ This being the case, it would not be wise to interpret Aquinas

²¹⁶ Francis Turretin makes the same move. See his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III.xi.8-9.

²¹⁷ Emphasis mine.

²¹⁸ Emphasis mine.

as holding that the past and future are on the same ontological par with the present.

With that in mind, we can proceed with Aquinas's second strategy.

Aquinas, and others, hold that the present is co-existent with eternity.²¹⁹ As the Protestant scholastic Francis Turretin explains, all times coexist with eternity without being coexistent with each other. "Thus the past, while it was, coexisted in eternity, the present now coexists with it, and the future will coexist with it."²²⁰ How does this help with God's knowledge of the present? Aquinas continues his argument in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.66 as follows.

On the other hand things which to us are present, past, or future, are known to God as being not only in His power, but also in their respective causes, and in themselves. Of such things God is said to have *knowledge of vision*, because God sees the existence of things which, in relation to us, are not as yet, not only in their causes but also in themselves, in as much as His eternity is by its indivisibility present to all time.

This is not clear, but the argument seems to be this. God knows things that are past, present and future as they are represented in His power. He also knows them by knowing the cause of all things which is Himself. Yet, when it comes to knowing the concrete particulars in themselves He knows them when they are present because He is the cause of their existence. (*Summa Theologiae* I, Q14, a11) The present co-exists with eternity, and God knows the present by knowledge of vision.²²¹

²¹⁹ Rory Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 89-91.

²²⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III.xi.8-9.

²²¹ John Philoponus may be holding the same view as Aquinas. In *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World* 12-18, 71-82. My reason for uncertainty is that Philoponus argues against Proclus based on God's knowledge of present concrete particulars. If God knows what presently exists, then God must be constantly changing. Yet, Philoponus seems to use this argument as a way to convince Proclus that temporal terms must be given a non-temporal understanding when applied to God. The idea would be that Philoponus and Proclus both agree that God knows the presently existing concrete particulars, so they should both understand God's knowledge in a non-temporal way. However, in books 1-5, Philoponus continually seems to take what I have called the Augustinian position. It is also not clear how consistent Aquinas is on this position either. In *Summa Theologiae* I, Q14, a15, he deals with the objection that God's knowledge must be variable since God knows what occurs in time. Thomas does not mention God's knowledge of vision here, but says that all of God's knowledge is knowledge of His own substance.

One may wonder how Thomists can maintain that God is immutable. Since the present is constantly changing new moments of time are constantly coming into being and co-existing with eternity, then no longer co-existing with eternity as they cease to exist. Further, God's knowledge of vision will constantly be changing since He will constantly be aware of new concrete particulars.

The knowledge of vision clearly involves succession. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.69, Aquinas argues that God knows infinite things. One difficulty is that the infinite cannot be counted. God, says Aquinas, lacks succession, so He can know the infinite without having to traverse the infinite. "God does not know infinite things by *His knowledge of vision*, to use the expression employed by others, because the infinite neither is, nor was, nor will be actual." The knowledge of vision is about temporal succession, and one cannot reach actual infinity through succession. Instead, God "knows the infinite number by *His knowledge of simple intelligence*. For God knows the infinite number of things that neither are, nor will be, nor have been, and nevertheless are in the power of a creature. He knows also the infinite things that are in His power, that neither are, nor have been, nor shall be."

How might this shed light on Aquinas' solution? I take it that God's perfect knowledge of Himself is not increased in any way by God's knowledge of vision. But that seems less than obvious, for Aquinas asserts that by knowledge of vision God knows the concrete particulars as they are in themselves. That type of knowledge would certainly add to God's natural knowledge. At the very least, God would come to have knowledge *de re* through his knowledge of vision. It seems that God's knowledge of concrete particulars in themselves causes problems for divine timelessness because God's knowledge of vision is in constant flux.

The Augustinians did not have this problem for they denied God knowledge of things in time. But the Thomists think that God would be lacking a particular kind of knowledge if this were true. The divine temporalist agrees with the Thomist on this point. If God is cognitively excellent, He will have knowledge of concrete particulars in time. Granting God this type of knowledge, however, makes God temporal for what presently exists is in constant flux.

There is one possible way to remove this problem. One could deny presentism and adopt four-dimensional eternalism. On this theory of time there is no objective present for all moments of time are on an ontological par. Thus, God's knowledge of temporal things would not be in constant flux. Those who are not willing to get rid of presentism from their research program will not be able to make this move. As it stands, any Christian research program that holds to divine timelessness and presentism has a serious conflict between omniscience and knowledge of the present. She will most likely have to defend some version of the Augustinian option in order to assuage this difficulty. In the next chapter, however, I shall argue that this will be of little help. The Augustinian option may appear to avoid this difficulty, but it only does so by setting aside the systematic connections between omniscience, omnipresence, and divine sustaining. As we shall see in the next chapter, once those systematic connections are brought into view, the problems for divine timelessness become more difficult to avoid.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTISM, CREATION, AND THE TIMELESS GOD

In the previous chapter I argued that the classical tradition was committed to presentism. Then I looked at the difficulties that arise for timelessness, omniscience, and presentism. In this chapter I shall examine the problems that arise for atemporality from presentism and creation. As we shall see, Christian thinkers in the past were aware of these issues. What I shall do in this chapter is examine the ways that Christians in the past have dealt with the problems that arise from presentism and divine timelessness with regard to creation. I shall argue that their solutions to the problems are not successful, and that presentism is not compatible with divine timelessness. The main problems are as follows. First, one cannot say that the timeless God is the Creator, Redeemer, or Lord of creation. This is because the timeless God cannot be related to creation. Second, a timeless God cannot create a presentist temporal world out of nothing. Third, a timeless God cannot sustain a presentist world in existence.

The Timeless Creator

In *On the Catholic Faith* Boethius proclaims “this our religion which is called Christian and Catholic is founded chiefly on the following assertions. From all eternity, that is, before the world was established, and so before all that is meant by time began, there has existed one divine substance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in such wise that we confess the Father God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God, and yet not three Gods but one God.” He goes onto say, “The divine nature then, abiding from all eternity and unto all eternity without any change, by the exercise of a will

known only to Himself, determined of Himself to form the world, and brought it into being when it was absolutely naught.”

John Philoponus agrees. “God, since he is the creator of time, must create timelessly.” If God is immutable, simple, and timeless His creative action cannot cause a change in God. “[T]he creative activity of God is instantaneous.”²²² John of Damascus concurs as well. “For the creation, even though it originated later, is nevertheless not derived from the essence of God, but brought into existence out of nothing by His will and power, and change does not touch God’s nature.” (*Orthodox Faith* I.7)

As noted before, most Christians have traditionally held the relational theory of time. If there is a change, there is a time. Since God cannot undergo any change, He must be timeless. In *City of God* XI.6 Augustine explains as follows:

there could have been no time had not a creature been made whose movement would effect some change. It is because the parts of this motion and change cannot be simultaneous, since one part must follow another, that, in these shorter or longer intervals of duration, time begins. Now, since God, in whose eternity there is absolutely no change, is the Creator and Ruler of time, I do not see how we can say that He created the world after a space of time had elapsed unless we admit, also, that previously some creature had existed whose movements would mark the course of time.

Augustine is here expressing a commitment to the relational theory of time and divine immutability. He is also expressing his commitment to the notion that time began with creation.²²³

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* raises difficulties for immutability, timelessness, and simplicity. This is because the presentist tradition holds that the universe is not co-eternal with God. According to John of Damascus “it is not natural that that which is brought into existence out of nothing should be co-eternal with what

²²² John Philoponus, *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World 9-11*, translated by Michael Share (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2010), 46.

²²³ This is something Augustine explores further in *Confessions* XI. As noted before, John of Damascus disagrees with Augustine on this point.

is without beginning and everlasting.” (*Orthodox Faith* I.7) Aquinas in *On the Eternity of the World* 11 says “nothing can be co-eternal with God, because nothing can be immutable save God alone.” Augustine *City of God* XII concurs. “Since the flight of time involves change, it cannot be co-eternal with changeless eternity.” On this view there is a state of affairs where God does not exist with creation. There is also a state of affairs where God does exist with creation. The main difficulty is explaining how this does not create a change—a before and after—in the life of God. As we shall see, there are many related problems that stem from this difficulty.

Can a Timeless God be Called Creator, Redeemer, and Lord?

In *The Trinity* Augustine articulates an account of divine timelessness, simplicity, and immutability. He holds that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are timelessly coeternal. (*The Trinity* I.9) The three divine persons are one in substance, and this divine substance does not undergo any passage of time or change. (*The Trinity* I.3 and V.2) “In their own proper substance by which they are, the three are one, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, without any temporal movement, without any intervals of time or space, one and the same over all creation, one and the same all together from eternity to eternity, like eternity itself which is never without verity and charity.” (*The Trinity* IV.30) Further, the Godhead is immutable. “There is no modification in God because there is nothing in him that can be changed or lost...he remains absolutely unchangeable.” (*The Trinity* V.5) Yet, he allows for Trinitarian relational predicates to be made of God that do not modify the divine substance such as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all three are eternally related to each other. (*The Trinity* V.6) Also, the Godhead is simple in substance. (*The Trinity* V.9) Other substances participate in attributes like greatness, and as such are distinct from

greatness. The greatness in which they participate is something greater than them. Yet, this cannot be the case with God since “there is nothing greater than God. So he is great with a greatness by which he is himself the same greatness.” In other words, “God is the same thing to be as to be great.” And the same is true of all the other attributes we typically predicate of God like goodness, eternity and omnipotence (*The Trinity* V.11)

The doctrines of divine timelessness, immutability, and simplicity have been criticized in recent years as being in direct conflict with Scripture. Scripture proclaims that God does things in time. It predicates contingent temporal properties of God like *Creator, Redeemer, and Lord*. How might we understand this? Augustine has a hermeneutical principle that can be deployed to deal with troublesome passages. “Whatever there is in the word of God that cannot, when taken literally, be referred either to purity of life or soundness of doctrine, you may set down as figurative. Purity of life has reference to the love of God and one's neighbour; soundness of doctrine to the knowledge of God and one's neighbour.” (*On Christian Doctrine* III.10. Also, cf III.15) Working from this principle Augustine asserts that when scripture predicates of God “position, possession times, and places, they are not stated properly about God but by way of metaphor and simile.” (*The Trinity* V.9) Since Augustine thinks that it is proper to refer to God as timeless, any passage of scripture that says otherwise must be taken as speaking in some non-literal way.

Augustine is not out of the woods yet. He does not quickly dismiss all passages that ascribe temporal properties to God. Instead, He considers various issues that arise from scripture itself. One such issue that he deals with comes from creation. God is lord of creation, He created the universe out of nothing. Yet, creation has not

always existed—it is not co-eternal with God. Can we predicate *Creator* and *Lord* of a timeless God? Augustine lays out the problem in detail.

But what about “lord”? If a man is not called a lord except from the moment he begins to have a slave, then this relationship title too belongs to God from a point of time, since the creation he is lord of is not from everlasting. But then how will we be able to maintain that relationship terms are not modifications with God, since nothing happens to him in time because he is not changeable, as we established at the beginning of this discussion? (*The Trinity* V.17)

To put the problem a bit differently, God “cannot be everlastingly lord, or we would be compelled to say that creation is everlasting, because he would only be everlastingly lord if creation were everlastingly serving him.” (*The Trinity* V.17) We thus have a tension with the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing and divine timelessness. The universe has not always existed, but it comes to exist. God is said to exist timelessly and without any modification. It seems that God must undergo some kind of modification when creation comes into existence. “How then are we going to be able to maintain that nothing is said of God by way of modification?” Augustine answers as follows. “Well, we say that nothing happens to his nature to change it, and so these are not relationship modifications which happen with some change in the things they are predicated of... Thus when he is called something with reference to creation, while indeed he begins to be called it in time, we should understand that this does not involve anything happening to God’s own substance, but only to the created thing to which the relationship predicated of him refers.” In other words, God does not change essentially or relationally when creation comes into existence. “So it is clear that anything that can begin to be said about God in time which was not said about him before is said by way of relationship, and yet not by way of a modification of God, as though something has modified him.” (*The Trinity* V.17) It may sound as if Augustine is allowing for God to have relational properties, but that is not the case. Augustine understands that even relational properties would make God temporal.

Further, since God is simple He can have no accidental properties. This is why Augustine says that the relational property only befalls the creature and not God. This is a theme developed throughout the Middle Ages.

Following Augustine, Boethius holds that the category of relation “cannot be predicated at all of God.” (*The Trinity Is One God Not Three Gods* IV) It should be noted that Boethius and Augustine allow for relations when one is talking about the eternal relation between the divine persons of the Trinity. The denial of relations is with regard to God and anything *ad extra* to God. Peter Lombard further develops Augustine’s idea that the relational predicate befalls the creature and not God. “For there are some things which are said of God in time and which are fitting for him in time without any change on his part. These are said relatively, according to an accident which does not befall God, but which befalls the creatures, such as creator, lord, refuge, giver or granted, and suchlike.” (*Sentences* Book I Dist. XXX.1) A bit further on Lombard summarizes Augustine’s thoughts from *The Trinity* V. “From these comments, it is plainly shown that some things are said of God in time relative to creatures, without change of the deity but not without change of the creature; and so the accident is in the creature, not in the Creator. And the name by which the creature is called relative to the Creator is relative, and it denotes the relation which is in the creature itself; the name by which the Creator is called relative to the creature is also relative, but it denotes no relation which is in the Creator.” (*Sentences* Book I Dist. XXX.1)

The idea is that when we come to passages like Psalm 90:1 where God is said to be our dwelling place or refuge, we interpret this to mean that we have changed and that God remains the same. This is because God is *not related* to the creature, though the creature is related to God. Augustine and Lombard both give several examples of

this notion. Say that Peter is unrepentant in his sins. He stands in God's wrath. Yet, God's wrath against sin has always been the same, so Augustine and Lombard say no change has occurred in God's nature. Say that Peter then becomes repentant and begins to enjoy the grace and love of God. Augustine and Lombard maintain that God has not changed; only Peter has. God is love; He always has been and always will be eternally without time.

Is this satisfactory to prevent God from having accidental properties and remaining timeless, immutable, and simple? Surely not. Grant that God is eternally and necessarily love. It still seems that God undergoes a change in bestowing grace and love on the repentant Peter since Peter does not become repentant until a particular time. Augustine and Lombard will quickly appeal to the doctrine of predestination at this point. God has eternally decreed to love Peter, they will say, and as such God has undergone no change in His decree. Does this really solve anything? Not at all. God's eternal decree to bestow grace upon Peter is not identical to the actual manifestation of that grace upon Peter for Peter does not eternally exist. God cannot bestow grace on Peter or express His love towards Peter until the actual concrete particular that is Peter comes into existence. God can express all sorts of loving gestures toward Peter before Peter comes to exist (e.g. eternally decree to send the Son and temporally send the Son), but certain expressions of love simply cannot occur until Peter in fact exists. This involves God activating a potential that He did not previously actualize: *bestowing grace on Peter*. It also involves God coming to have an accidental property: *the bestower of grace on Peter*.²²⁴ God has undergone a change, and Augustine and Lombard have failed to rebut this difficulty.

²²⁴ Bruce Ware refers to this as God's relational mutability since passages like Eph 2:3 describe God as changing His attitude towards persons who are in Christ. See Ware, "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," in ed. Bruce Ware, *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 91.

The same problem arises from creation. God cannot be the creator until He causally brings about the universe into existence. Thomas F. Torrance says that, “God was always Father, but not always Creator.”²²⁵ God has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but creation has not always existed. It seems, for all the world, that when the universe came into existence out of nothing God began to stand in a new causal relation that He did not previously stand in. Augustine and Lombard’s claim that the accidental properties befall the creature and not God is nothing more than a linguistic game, and does nothing to assuage the problem.

But grant Augustine and Lombard their claim for the moment. Another problem arises. Say that the accidental relational properties only fall upon creatures and not God. When a man cries out in prayer, ‘God my Creator and Savior,’ is he offering up proper praise to God? Augustine and Lombard will say yes. It is perfectly appropriate to predicate of God the titles *Creator* and *Savior* just as long as we remember that the accidental property really befalls us and not God. Yet, if the property *Creator* does not really apply to God but instead expresses a property in us, how can it be said that it is appropriate to predicate of God? It does not actually express anything at all about God. When we cry out in praise we are really saying things about ourselves. This looks like a clear case of religious subjectivism.

“According to the religious subjectivist, religious sentences are about the states of minds of religious believers.”²²⁶ In offering up various speech acts with the intent of praising God we are in fact doing no such thing. We are only expressing things about ourselves and not anything about extramental reality.

Surely Augustine and Lombard would find religious subjectivism repugnant. In fact, I think it obvious that both would consider themselves to be engaged in

²²⁵ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (New York: T & T Clark, 1996), 237.

²²⁶ Michael Scott, “Religious Language,” *Philosophy Compass* 5 (2010), 508.

serious theological work that does in fact say true things about God. Of course they would be modest and say that they do not perfectly comprehend God, but there should be little doubt that they are realists about theological language. Both articulate accounts of predicates that can be said of God's essence: properties like goodness, wisdom, and so on. It is hard to see how anyone who is a Christian theological realist could actually believe this notion that the accidental predicates like *Creator* and *Redeemer* are not true of the Biblical God but only true of ourselves. Further, if it is only true about ourselves, then why should we think that it is appropriate to say we are speaking about God? Either we are speaking about God, or we are not. It seems that this is another doctrine that someone can only pay lip service to but not actually believe because the Christian God is really related to the world and is truly the Creator and Redeemer. This puts Christian theology in direct conflict with the entailments of the divine timeless research program.

Is God Related to Creation?

This may seem to be an odd question. Christians hold that God is deeply and intimately related to creation. One minimal claim of Christianity is that creation would not exist if God did not sustain it in existence.²²⁷ But, as we saw in the last section, it is difficult to hold that God is simple, immutable and timeless, and that He stands in relation to a temporal universe. But things are even worse than they appear.

Boethius in *The Trinity is One God Not Three Gods* IV says, "There are in all ten categories which can be universally predicated of things, namely, Substance, Quality, Quantity, Relation, Place, Time, Condition, Situation, Activity, Passivity. Their meaning is determined by the contingent subject; for some of them denote real

²²⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* 5.

substantive attributes of created things, others belong to the class of accidental attributes. But when these categories are applied to God they change their meaning entirely. Relation, for instance, cannot be predicated at all of God; for substance in Him is not really substantial but supersubstantial. So with quality and the other possible tributes, of which we must add examples for the sake of clearness.”

We have a bizarre claim on our hands: relation cannot be predicated of the simple, immutable, and timeless God. But Christians are deeply committed to the notion that God is related to creatures. Not just merely related, but intimately related such that we can say the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh, and that we are His children.

As discussed above, Augustine and Lombard hold that God cannot undergo intrinsic and extrinsic changes. Relational properties, for instance, do not apply to God, but only befall the creature. Aquinas further develops this idea that God cannot have any relational predicates. The relations cannot be in God as an accident since a simple God has no accidental properties. Nor can the relations be thought of as predicated of God’s substance because “it would follow that God’s substance is essentially referred to another, depends in some way thereon, since it can neither exist nor be understood without it. Hence it would follow that God’s substance is dependent on something else outside it: and thus it would not be of itself necessary being.” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.12)

For the classical theologian the category of relation simply cannot apply to God if He is simple, immutable, and timeless. This is because they held that the relations are dependent upon each other. Since God exists *a se* and is dependent upon nothing outside of Himself, He cannot stand in a relation to anything outside of Himself. This is bizarre to contemporary ears for we do not think that most instances of relationships

entail that the existence of the relata are dependent upon each other. For instance, I stand in a relationship to my mother but we can exist without each other. In fact, my mother existed without me for 30 years of her life. The relationship that we stand in is dependent upon our existence, but our existence is not dependent upon the relationship. What is going on here with Aquinas' understanding of relations? What makes his account different from ours?

Aquinas is following an Aristotelian theory of relations. For most instances of relations this means that a relation is something that relates two or more substances. This relation involves the substances having accidental properties in virtue of standing in a relation to the other. Since a relation involves two or more substances, a substance cannot itself be a relation. This seems quite reasonable to contemporary ears, but there is more to the story.

On this Aristotelian account there are three modes of relations. First-mode relations are numerical relations founded on the category of quantity. For instance, I can say that I have three oranges. Second-mode relations are between active and passive things. These are founded on an absolute category. An example would be the relation between a fire and an egg that it boils. The fire is actively heating the egg. Third-mode relations can be founded on any of the categories, and they can involve things like the relation between measurable and measured, or knower and known.²²⁸ It is third-mode relation that Aquinas has in mind here.

Aquinas, following the traditional interpretation of third-mode relations, holds that these relations involve a non-mutuality condition. For instance, there is a thing that is knowable regardless of whether or not anyone knows about it. The knower is

²²⁸ Peter King, "Scotus on Metaphysics," in ed. Thomas Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36. Michael J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*, 2nd Edition (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2008), 165-9.

dependent upon the knowable, but the knowable is not dependent upon the knower.²²⁹ The non-mutuality condition is said to deny a co-relation between the relata. As such, one of the relata can have an accidental property, whereas the other does not. The two relata are in a mind-dependent relation, and not a real extramental relation. Hence, only one of the relata is in the relationship whereas the other is not involved in the relationship. This is where Aquinas parts company with contemporary notions of relations. Most do not think that a relation can obtain when one of the relata is not standing in a relationship to the other relatum. But many philosophers in the Middle Ages thought otherwise and used this to answer theological puzzles.

What about the problem that Augustine and Lombard tried to deal with earlier? It seems perfectly appropriate to say that God is my Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. Since God has not always been these things, this must surely involve some kind of change. Aquinas agrees that this would involve change. “Whatever receives something anew, must needs be changed, either essentially or accidentally. Now certain relations are said of God anew: for instance that He is Lord or governor of a thing which begins anew to exist. Wherefore if a relation were predicated of God as really existing in Him, it would follow that something accrues to God anew, and consequently that He is changed either essentially or accidentally.” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.12) But Aquinas thinks that God cannot undergo any essential change, and a simple God does not have any accidental properties.

How are we supposed to solve this problem? The relations that we predicate of God are not in Him, nor are they extrinsic to Him. We refer to God all the time in worship, in theology—both natural and revealed—and so on. What is the solution? These relations, says Aquinas, “are not really in Him, and yet are predicated of Him,

²²⁹ King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” 36-7.

it remains that they are ascribed to Him according only to our way of understanding.” Other predicates, like wisdom, are appropriately said of God because they denote His essence. These types of predicates are extramental. When it comes to relational predicates this is not the case. They exist in our mind only and do not apply to God, as is the case with all third-mode relations. Aquinas maintains that our understanding is not false since we predicate relations of God because “the divine effects terminate in God Himself.” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.13-14)

This seems obviously false. If our relational predicates do not apply to God at all, but only exist in our minds, what are we doing in a worship service? I would imagine that the average person in the pew thinks that she is singing about God. When she sings, ‘Lord my Creator’ she is intending to actually refer to God. But on the picture that we have from Aquinas, this is not the case. When singing ‘Lord my Creator’ she is not referring to God. The phrase from the song does not apply to any extramental reality. Instead it is only stating something about the creature. This is the same problem that Augustine and Lombard face.

In medieval philosophy relations were held to obtain between extramental things.²³⁰ For instance, the predicates *slave* and *master* are grounded in a real relation between two persons. Yet, medieval philosophers also held that there are non-paradigmatic cases of relations where two accidental properties are not involved. Say that Peter begins to think about Socrates. The accidental property, they would say, belongs to Peter only. No accidental property befalls Socrates since Socrates, they

²³⁰ There are many views on relations in Medieval philosophy, yet one agreement seems to be that polyadic properties and relations cannot exist outside of the mind. For instance, one might say there is a relation between a father and a son. Yet, medieval philosophers would maintain that this relationship does not exist outside of the mind. The relation expresses something between two subjects, but nothing in the subjects. There is an accidental property that the son has (i.e. *being the son*), but it cannot be the same property that the father has. The father cannot be the son in this relation, but he does have the property *being the father* because of this relation. See Jeffrey Brower, “Medieval Theories of Relations,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relations-medieval/>, 3.

say, is not actually related to Peter in this instance. Another example of a non-paradigmatic case was God. A simple God can have no accidental properties. As such it is hard to explain how a simple God can stand in relations with creation. This is why they deny that God stands in a real relation to creation.

In the case of Peter thinking about Socrates, later medieval thinkers argued that there was a relation of reason. Peter clearly has the extramental property *thinking about Socrates*. What corresponds to our concept *being thought about*? One might be tempted to say that Socrates has this accidental property, but later medieval thinkers argued that this is a concept that has no extramental reality. It exists in our minds only. When applied to God, since these accidental properties are conceptual only, they cannot cause any real change in God.²³¹

It should strike one as implausible that a relation obtains between one relatum and not the other relatum in the relation. Typically we think that a relation is a two-way street. When x stands in a relation to y , it is also the case that y stands in a relation to x . This move, however, says that x stands in a relation to y , but that y does not stand in any relation to x . This appears to be self-contradictory. This seems to be saying that a relation obtains when in fact no relation obtains. If one is forced to deny the commonsense notion of relations in order to maintain divine timelessness, simplicity, and immutability, one should reconsider one's position.

Not only does it fly in the face of commonsense metaphysics, it brings about severe incoherence within one's theology. The problem is that a real relation involves

²³¹ Brower, "Medieval Theories of Relations," 5.1. It is not entirely clear that Aquinas always wishes to say that predicates like *Creator* and *Lord* are relations of reason that only exist in the minds of creatures. In *De Potentia*, Q7, a. 11, Aquinas says that if there were no created intellect in existence, God would still be Lord because Lord expresses a relation of reason. Brower notes that this is a move away from the Aristotelian understanding of relations that is motivated in part by theological considerations. Brower points out that "this shift away from the traditional Aristotelian conception has the awkward consequence that things can be related even if their relations do not exist." This is clearly against the common sense notion that relations obtain between a plurality of things.

an extramental foundation, and Aquinas, in *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*, is denying that relations in God are extramental. This claim is too strong and undermines what Aquinas wishes to say elsewhere in his theology.

For instance, Aquinas' five ways depend on God's causal activity. If God is not really the cause of the world, but only in our minds, natural theology is an utter failure. The atheist will be happy to say that the world's causal dependence upon God exists in the minds of believers only. The Christian cannot be sanguine about this. Another problem is that God cannot be omnipresent. For Aquinas, God is omnipresent through His power which sustains all of creation in existence. An incorporeal thing like God "stands in relation to being somewhere by its power." (*Summa Contra Gentiles* III.68) This looks like a clear example of second-mode relations, but we are forbidden from saying this in light of simplicity, immutability, and timelessness. If we deny real relations of God, then we must say that <God is not omnipresent>. We can say that <God is omnipresent> as long as we admit that this is strictly false and give it a different interpretation because this relation exists only in our minds. Again, the atheist will be happy to accept this, but the Christian cannot. As such, she should reject Aquinas' denial of real relations.

Of course, if we reject this claim we allow for God to have accidental properties as creatures continually refer to God in worship, and as God continually causally sustains all things in existence. As such, God cannot be timeless, strongly immutable, and simple.

Perhaps one might invoke the Scotistic real relation at this point and ditch the previous account. A "real change" or "real relation" in John Duns Scotus' thought means a change or relation that is essential or intrinsic to the subject. For instance, one might say that creatures are really related to God in that creatures are essentially

dependent upon God for their existence. God is not really related to creatures because the existence of creatures is not essential to Him. But Scotus rejects the traditional interpretation of third-mode relations that was discussed above, and this is an important feature in his account of real relations. This departure from the traditional interpretation is not something Augustine, Lombard, or Aquinas take. For Scotus, third-mode relations are mutual and co-relative. This means that a third-mode relation does involve, at the very least, an extrinsic property in the terminus of the relation. Further, Scotus, unlike Aquinas, clearly denies “the traditional view that the co-relation of a third-mode relation is a relation of reason. God really is correctly described as the Creator regardless of whether there are any minds to think so.”²³² Scotus’ account of real relations may be a helpful way to think about relations, but it isn’t what Aquinas holds, so it will not help Aquinas.²³³ Also, it allows for us to call God the Creator, and Aquinas admits that such a predication involves change. Hence, God would not be timeless.

Can a Timeless God Create a Temporal World?

There are several objections to the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing based on divine timelessness. Many of the arguments try to conclude that the world must be eternal since God is eternal. This will be taken up at length in the section on John Philoponus, but for now it would be good to see how others have addressed the issue. Aquinas addresses this objection in several works. One argument can go like this.²³⁴ Temporal causes produce temporal effects. Eternal causes produce

²³² King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” 37.

²³³ However, it does not appear that Scotus is always consistent with his account of the relation between God and creatures. In *God and Creatures* Q1.25 he says, “Now every extrinsic relationship of God to creatures is only conceptual.”

²³⁴ This is my own variant from the objections that Aquinas considers in *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.32.

eternal effects. God is eternal. God willed that creation exist. God's will causes creation to exist. God's will is eternal, so creation must be eternal. The problem is that the biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* clearly entails that the universe is not eternal, but is finite in the past. The Christian who holds to divine timelessness has to explain why God's eternal will to create does not entail the eternity of the world.

Perhaps one can respond by pointing out that God is a voluntary agent. His act of creation is said to be free. When an agent voluntarily wills to produce something she can delay for various reasons. Perhaps the agent needs to wait for the right time. Say Molly has a bill to pay, but she does not get paid until Friday. She must wait until Friday to pay the bill due to a current lack of funds. She wills to pay the bill, but her action must wait. Or say that Molly wills to get married, but she is presently single. Her action must wait until she finds a man.

This cannot be the case with the simple, immutable, and timeless God. Necessarily, a timeless God cannot wait. Necessarily, a God who is strongly immutable cannot begin to perform a new action. Necessarily, a God who is pure act cannot delay His action. His eternal acts must produce eternal effects. As such, God's eternal act of creation must produce an eternal world. How can the atemporalist respond?

Aquinas' responses are, unfortunately, underwhelming. One response is simply to deny that eternal acts necessarily produce eternal effects. Though Aquinas does not explicitly say "necessarily" he must hold it. This is because he believes in the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. In this instance Aquinas must surely hold that God's eternal act must produce an eternal effect. Otherwise there would be a time when the Son and Holy Spirit were not. Despite the fact that eternal generation and procession are an ineffable mystery, and

that I find ineffable mysteries to be incoherent and repugnant to Christian theology, I will grant that it gives us a clear example of an eternal cause with an eternal effect.²³⁵

What Aquinas needs to do is offer a clear example of an eternal cause with a temporal effect. This is precisely what Aquinas does not do.

He says that God's "act of understanding and willing must be His act of making. Now the effect follows from the intellect and the will according to the determination of the intellect and the command of the will. And just as every other condition of the thing made is determined by the intellect, so is time appointed to it." Just as God "wills this thing to be such and such, so does [He] will it to be at such and such a time." (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.35)

The idea seems to be this. When an agent wills that such and such take place, she wills that it take place at a certain time. Her will need not immediately produce the intended effect. Perhaps an example will help. I get motion sickness very easily. One day I decide to go to Edinburgh. I know that I must take medicine before I get on the train in order to prevent illness. However, the medicine has clear directions that it should be taken 20 minutes before travel. About a week before my trip I will that I take the medicine 20 minutes before travel. My will never changes throughout the week, but I do not act until the right time. If I take the medicine immediately following my will it shall be of no use to me. As such, I must wait to act until 20 minutes prior to travel. My will in this instance does not produce an immediate effect.

The problem is that this in no way helps Aquinas explain how the will of an eternal God does not produce an eternal effect. The reason my will did not produce an immediate effect is because my will and act are distinct. For Aquinas, God is simple. God's will, intellect, act, and so on are all identical to God. The above scenario

²³⁵ Lombard, *Sentences* I, Dist. IX.1. He states that eternal generation is an ineffable mystery. I have no problem with mysteries of the faith. I object to *ineffable* mysteries.

describes something that God cannot do if He is simple, immutable, and timeless. Aquinas has failed to defeat the objection. What makes this failure even more serious is that several of Aquinas' later rejoinders to other objections assume the success of this one.

The Problem of Divine Sustaining

Another problem for the timelessness research program is related to God's act of sustaining the universe in existence. This will be treated fully in the section below on John Philoponus, but for now I wish to lay out some of the initial difficulties. Throughout this thesis I have discussed the common belief that eternity and the present are synced. The notion that God's eternity syncs up with the present is essential for Christian thought because eternity is said to contain time or sustain the universe in existence. God's sustaining of the world in existence has traditionally been tied up in the doctrine of divine omnipresence. It will be illuminating to see the way previous thinkers have tried to deal with the problems that arise from a commitment to divine timelessness, omnipresence, divine sustaining, and presentism. This will help us to see where exactly the problems are, and why the proposed solutions fail.

I will begin with Anselm's discussion on these matters. Throughout *Monologion* and *Proslogion* Anselm claims that God exists *at* every place and time. Then he is quick to qualify this by saying that God does not exist *in* any place or time. What is Anselm trying to say?

He says of God, "You exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside all time." (*Proslogion* 19) Yet, he also says that God has "neither past nor future existence but only present existence; nor can You be thought not to

exist at any time.”(*Proslogion* 22) God must exist at all times and places, but somehow he is absolutely outside time. This sounds rather confusing, but what must be understood is that Anselm is attempting to distinguish God’s eternity from time as well as establish the fact that God sustains each moment of time in existence.²³⁶ For Anselm, God’s eternity contains all of time such that he can say that God does not exist in any place or time, but that God exists wholly at all times and all places.²³⁷

Anselm wishes to deny that God is contained in time and place because that would limit God. “[I]t would seem that only things that are limited to the time and place they are in are bound by the law of time and place.”(*Monologion* 22) For creatures that are limited by time and place they can only exist wholly at the times and places that they are bound to. God, who transcends time and place, is not bound by time and place and as such can exist wholly at all times and places. “The creator of all substances, the supreme substance, is necessarily free from the natures and laws of everything it has created from nothing. It is not subject to them.”(*Monologion* 22) Anselm proclaims of God that “nothing is greater than You, no place or time confines You but You exist everywhere and always. And because this can be said of You alone, You alone are unlimited and eternal.”(*Proslogion* 13) God is not contained nor constrained by the universe, therefore “it is necessary that [He] be present as a whole simultaneously to all places and times, and to each individual place and time.”(*Monologion* 22)²³⁸

²³⁶Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 185-6.

²³⁷See Anselm, *Proslogion*, 19-21.

²³⁸ Aquinas makes a similar statement in *Summa Contra Gentiles* III.68. “[T]he mover and the thing moved must be simultaneous.” And later, “The active cause must needs be joined together with its proximate and immediate effect. Now in each thing there is a proximate and immediate effect of God. . . Accordingly God must be present in all things at the same time: especially since those things He called into being from non-being, are continually preserved in being by him.” Lest some should be confused, we should recall that Aquinas is a committed presentist.

God cannot be contained in time and place, and yet He exists at every time and place. God “exists everywhere, in everything and through everything.”(*Monologion* 20) God must exist as a whole at everywhere and everywhen because “nothing ever, or anywhere, exists without God.”(*Monologion* 21) Creatures can exist as a whole *in* time because they endure through time. God exists as a whole outside of time, and yet Anselm wishes to say that He exists *at* every time. We have a clear tension. God exists timelessly. Yet, in order for anything other than God to exist “it is necessary that [God] be present as a whole simultaneously to all places and times, and to each individual place and time.”(*Monologion* 22)

How can this be understood? Some will try to argue that Anselm is a four-dimensional eternalist. As such, God can be wholly present to the entire spacetime manifold. But “Anselm is clearly and unequivocally a presentist.”²³⁹ When comparing God’s eternal present to our temporal present he makes this very clear. “Nor does part of [God’s] eternity leak away with the past into non-existence, or fly past, like the scarcely existing momentary present, or, with the future, wait, pending, in not-yet existence.”(*Monologion* 22) A clearer proclamation of presentism cannot be found. To say that Anselm is a four-dimensionalist is to ignore the many statements like this that Anselm makes.²⁴⁰ He does not say that the past and future appear to be non-existent from our perspective. Instead, he is making a direct move from the way the world actually is—presentism—to the way eternity actually is. Anselm’s comparison would be completely undermined if he were a four-dimensionalist.

²³⁹ Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 102.

²⁴⁰ Another great example is *Proslogion*, 22. “what has had a past existence but does not now exist, and a future existence but does not yet exist.” Throughout *De Concordia* book I, he continually talks about things not always existing in time, or things that do not yet exist, as well as the moveable present. These are things that cannot be true if Anselm is a four-dimensionalist.

On presentism, the present moment is the only moment of time that exists. All that exists exists at the present. In order to flesh out God's sustaining of the universe Anselm makes a direct comparison between God's eternal present and our temporal present. "Indeed, just as our present time envelops every place and whatever is in every place, so in the eternal present all time is encompassed along with whatever exists at any time." (*De Concordia* I.5) God's eternal present "sustains everything other than itself, preventing everything from falling into nothingness." (*Monologion* 22)

Fair enough; God's eternal present syncs up with our temporal present by sustaining it, and all that it contains, in existence. Yet, wouldn't this mean that God is constantly undergoing change? He sustains one moment of time in existence, and then as that moment ceases to exist, He causally sustains another moment. Anselm never addresses this problem as far as I know.

Aquinas and his contemporaries have a standard reply to this type of objection.²⁴¹ God's will never changes. God always wills His good: whether or not God wills that some thing exist, He always wills His good as the final end. (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.31)

This is a woefully unhelpful reply. The issue of God's will undergoing change can be distinguished from God's action.²⁴² God could eternally will that some thing x come to exist at time t_1 , but God cannot eternally act at t_1 because that time does not always exist. One can appeal to timeless acts with temporal effects if she so wishes. All she needs to do is to offer a plausible model of timeless acts that bring about

²⁴¹ See Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 238-42 for a discussion of this move throughout Christian history. Michael Dodds offers the same response. *The Unchanging God of Love*, 181.

²⁴² Of course, divine simplicity will not allow this. If God is simple His act and will are identical. This would mean that His eternal act must have an eternal effect. This will be discussed in the section on Philoponus.

temporal effects in a presentist world. At the moment there are no plausible models.²⁴³

In fact, every model that I know of is based on analogies involving temporal agents and temporal effects. For instance, two common analogies are as follows. ‘I will to go to the movies later, but not now.’ And, ‘I set my heater to turn on at 5:00.’ It is true that the agents in these analogies have a determinate will that never changes, but these are temporal agents who will one thing at a time and act at another time. This simply cannot help us understand an atemporal agent’s acts that have temporal effects.

Further, these analogies are dependent upon agents with distinct wills and acts. This cannot shed any light on a simple God whose act and will are identical.²⁴⁴

Peter Lombard struggles with similar difficulties. God who is “existing ever unchangeably in himself, by presence, power, and essence is in every nature or essence without limitation of himself, and in every place without being bounded, and in every time without change.” One of the issues that Lombard attempts to answer has to do with how God is more present in the lives of the saints than in the lives of

²⁴³ Stump and Kretzmann once offered the ET-Simultaneity model, but it has no serious defenders today. Leftow and Helm—both atemporalists—have rejected it in several writings. Just about every divine temporalist has taken their turn refuting it. Katherin Rogers, T.J. Mawson, and Don Lodzinski all hold to atemporalism and four-dimensional eternalism. As such, they have no need for ET-Simultaneity, and never make an appeal to it. Robert Russell is someone at the forefront of contemporary discussions on divine action. He is an atemporalist and a four-dimensional eternalist. He also never makes any appeal to ET-Simultaneity. In a recent paper Thomas Schartle asserts in a footnote that ET-Simultaneity works because relative identity works. The problem with this is that relative identity does not work. Further, Schartle neither articulates ET-Simultaneity nor explains how it could possibly work. See his, “Why We Need God’s Eternity: Some Remarks to Support a Classic Notion,” in eds. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier, *God, Eternity, and Time* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 47. Thomas Greenlee also briefly asserts ET-Simultaneity without any argument or articulation. He holds to four-dimensional eternalism and seems to be unaware of the fact that he does not need this obscure doctrine. Thomas Greenlee, “Relativity, God, and Time,” in ed. Melville Y. Stewart, *Science and Religion in Dialogue Volume 1* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 91.

²⁴⁴ In the 17th Century, Pierre Gassendi offered a similar complaint. He expresses a dissatisfaction with the fact that no defender of divine timelessness has explained how eternity could be coexistent with the successions of time, and states they will continue in this failure until the second coming. Atemporalists have not bestowed “one serious thought upon the consideration of it; for had they, doubtless they must have found their Wit a loss in the Labyrinth of Fancy, and perceived themselves reduced to this Exigent: either that they had fooled themselves in trifling with words not well understood; or that they had praecariously usurped the Quaestion.” *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana, or, A Fabrick of Science Natural, Upon the Hypothesis of Atoms founded by Epicurus, Repaired by Petrus Gassendus, Augmented by Walter Charleton* (London: Tho. Newcomb, 1654), 80.

others. This is related to God's grace, and as such, would take us off topic. Another issue is this: Where was God, or where did God dwell, before there was a creature? The saints of God are His temple. Earth is His footstool. Where did He dwell before these things came into existence? In Himself. The "saints are not the house of God in such a way that, if the house is taken away, God falls. Instead, God dwells in the saints in such a way that, if he should depart, they fall." Much like Anselm, Lombard is saying that God's presence sustains all created things in existence. Yet, Lombard thinks more is contained in this idea. What more is contained in this idea? I don't know, and neither does Lombard. He leaves it as a mystery.

A final issue that is directly relevant is whether or not God's presence makes Him subject to change and time. Lombard considers the following objection. "Every day, creatures are made which do not exist before, and God is in them, but he was not in them before; it follows that he is where he was not before, and so he seems to be mutable." This argument has some serious teeth. Unfortunately Lombard's rejoinder does not. "But although every day he begins to be in creatures in which he was not before, because they did not exist, yet this happens without change on his part, just as he began to be in the world which he made, and yet without change. Similarly, without change on his part, he also ceases to be in things in which he was before; he does not at that time cease to be in the place, but the place ceases to be." (*Sentences I Dist. XXXVII*)

I might be mistaken, but this rejoinder looks like little more than 'I know it looks as if God changes, but He doesn't.' God's continual causal activity of sustaining creation in existence is a serious defeater for divine timelessness. Much more is needed to remove the defeater than simply saying, "nope." Thankfully for

atemporalists John Philoponus has offered a thorough treatment of these related problems. Perhaps he can sort things out for us.

John Philoponus to the Rescue?

A Proclus' Inspired Dilemma

In the 6th Century John Philoponus examined an argument from Proclus that he took to be an objection to the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* based on divine perfection.²⁴⁵ Before laying out the argument, there are two assumptions that Proclus and Philoponus hold about time. First, they both seem to hold to a relational view of time where time is change or movement. This is clear from their statements on God's immutability. Second, they both hold to presentism.²⁴⁶ With these two assumptions we can begin Proclus' dilemma.

Proclus' argument goes a little something like this.²⁴⁷ Assume that God is simple. God lacks physical and metaphysical composition. God's wisdom, power,

²⁴⁵ It is a matter of debate as to whether or not Proclus' work on the eternity of the world was intended as an attack on Christian theology. It is also a matter of debate as to whether or not Philoponus' response is written from his Christian perspective or as a Platonic philosopher. See Dirk Baltzly, 'Proclus', in eds. Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis, *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion Volume 1: Ancient Philosophy of Religion* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2009), 265. Christian Wildberg, "John Philoponus," in ed. Edward Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/philoponus/>. Also, Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World*, introduction, translation, and commentary by Helen S. Lang and A.D. Macro (University of California Press, 2001), 1-16. Regardless, Christians followed the moves Philoponus made thereafter. See G.R. Evans, *Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1993), 69.

²⁴⁶ There are several clear statements on presentism in Philoponus' treatise against Proclus. For instance, "all things have their existence in the present." John Philoponus, *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World 12-18*, translated by James Wilberding (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2006), 79. This is in the midst of a discussion where Philoponus is arguing that God must have knowledge of the present. God "will not even know whether He Himself exists, if He does not know the present. For He too, exists."

²⁴⁷ John Philoponus, *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World 1-5*, translated by Michael Share (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2004), 42, 50, and 64. As Philoponus portrays Proclus' argument, there are actually a few different subtleties. The second horn of the dilemma isn't simply that God is not perfect. Proclus goes on to argue that this less than perfect god must have been created by an actual perfect God. Within Aristotelian thought, immutability and necessity are seen as equivalent, as are contingency and mutability. The assumption, then, is that if the Christian God suffers any change, He must be contingent. For those of us living after John Duns Scotus it is hard to see how necessity and immutability are equivalent.

goodness, thoughts, will, and so forth are all identical to each other and identical to God. Further, God is purely actual; He contains no potentiality. Divine simplicity is part of a package that includes a strong doctrine of immutability and timelessness, and these attributes are mutually entailing. As immutable, God undergoes no intrinsic or extrinsic change. As simple, He has no accidental properties. As timeless, God exists without beginning, without end, and without succession or moments in His life. A timeless God lacks temporal extension and location.²⁴⁸

Assume further that the act of creation is brought about by the thoughts and will of God. God's thoughts are what directly bring creation into existence. Since God's thoughts are identical to God Himself, and since God is eternal, God's thoughts are eternal (without beginning, without end, and without succession). As such, creation must also be eternal (not timeless, but existing without beginning and without end). God is always thinking the thoughts that bring creation into existence.

Classical Christians will not like this conclusion since they hold that God freely created the universe *ex nihilo* at some point in the finite past. As Philoponus explains, God always possesses the principles and Forms of creation within Himself. God is actual and perfect for He always has the capacity to create, "but God brings each thing into existence and gives it being when he so wishes...and he so wishes at the time when coming into existence is good for the things to come into existence."²⁴⁹

Proclus does not see this as a viable option for a perfect God. In order to make his conclusion stick he offers what appears to him to be the only alternative account for God and creation. It is an account that classical Christians will find unsatisfactory. One could say that God does not always create or produce the universe. Instead God comes to produce the universe. But, argues Proclus, God would then not be purely

²⁴⁸ John Philoponus, *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World* 12-18, 65.

²⁴⁹ Philoponus, *Against Proclus* 1-5, 64.

actual for He goes from a state of not creating to creating. He has some potential that becomes actual. Hence, we have destroyed divine simplicity. Further, God is undergoing change in this act. He brings new moments into existence. As such, God is not immutable nor is He timeless. A God who undergoes change, and is not purely actual is not perfect.

As Philoponus examines this argument he looks at one further line of attack that strengthens the dilemma. It would seem that if God does not eternally will creation into existence, He must will that some objects exist and then not exist. Say that God wills Socrates to exist and then no longer wills that Socrates exist. Socrates comes into existence then ceases to exist. It would seem that we have three moments in the life of God: existing without Socrates, existing with Socrates, and then again existing without Socrates. God's life is undergoing constant alteration through this process of willing things into existence and no longer willing them in existence. Also, God's will is divided in this process for He wills one thing and then another. As such, God cannot be timeless, immutable, or simple, and such a being is not perfect.

The dilemma seems to be this. Either God is perfect (simple, immutable, and timeless) and creation is eternal, or creation is not eternal and God is not perfect.

Philoponus Against Proclus

Philoponus offers several arguments against Proclus' critique of Christian belief. Many of them depend on offering a proper interpretation of Plato and Aristotle's philosophy and science since Proclus and Philoponus are both working within these philosophical traditions. For instance, Philoponus' first line of attack is to argue that the world cannot be infinite in the past since, following Aristotle, it is

impossible to traverse the infinite. Since Proclus is an Aristotelian, Philoponus thinks that Proclus must accept this.²⁵⁰

Another line of reasoning is to turn Proclus' argument on himself. Grant Proclus the claim that the cosmos is without beginning or end, that it is infinite in the past and the future. Since the present is the only moment that exists, God is only sustaining the present moment in existence. God is not the actual creator of the future since the future does not yet exist. God is only the actual creator of the present moment. So even on Proclus' account of God and creation it is the case that God is not purely actual and thus not perfect since He has not yet created the future.²⁵¹ However, Philoponus' main argument is that this understanding of pure act and perfection is mistaken as we shall see in the next argument.

A third line of reasoning is to argue that the world is a pattern of the Forms, but that the Forms can exist without the world. God possesses the Forms, and it is possible for them to "pre-exist all created things. And so, even if the Forms and patterns of things are certain ideas and principles of the creator, in accordance with which he has brought the world into existence, it is certainly not necessary that the world itself should coexist from everlasting with God's knowledge about the world."²⁵² To quote Philoponus at length, he says

But just because he brings all things into existence by thought alone and always possesses the concepts and principles of all things in exactly the same way, it is not therefore at once necessary that things should have coexisted with the thoughts of God from everlasting...For God does not bring his creations into existence willy-nilly by a necessity, for which reason it is not at all necessary that whatever is thought by God should [automatically] exist simultaneously with the thought. For it is agreed that God knows even future things that have not yet come to pass...even future time is already present through foreknowledge to the creator of time himself.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Philoponus, *Against Proclus 1-5*, 19-41.

²⁵¹ Philoponus, *Against Proclus 1-5*, 69-78.

²⁵² Philoponus, *Against Proclus 1-5*, 42.

²⁵³ Philoponus, *Against Proclus 1-5*, 63. Bracketed words are inserted by the translator Michael Share.

One might wonder how this is possible. How could an eternal action not create an eternal effect? Following Proclus one might argue as follows. “If the creator is the creator of something, either he will always be an actual creator, or sometimes [only] a potential one [and] not always be creating.”²⁵⁴

From here Philoponus sets out to defend God’s perfection in light of His temporal creation. His defense starts with a careful examination of potential and actual in Aristotle, and then argues that Proclus’ use of ‘potential’ and ‘actual’ are ambiguous. With a proper understanding of these terms he thinks Proclus’ argument fails to go through. Philoponus distinguishes two types of potential and two types of actual. The first sense of potential is what one might call ‘natural fitness’ like when a child is naturally gifted at grammar. The child has the potential to become a great grammarian and make her parents proud. The second sense of potential is capacity. This is when the child has developed all of the skills of grammar and possesses all of the grammatical theorems in her mind. This second potentiality is the first sense of actuality. The child actually possesses the attributes to be considered a grammarian. But say that she is not currently practicing grammar. Perhaps she is asleep and not dreaming about grammatical theorems. She has the capacity to practice grammar since she is a grammarian, but she is not actively participating in that fast-paced cutthroat discipline. As such she is not actual in the second sense of actual which involves actively using her capacities.²⁵⁵

For Philoponus, God is actual in the first sense of actual. As such, God is not a potential creator since He possesses all of the attributes for being the creator. Proclus

²⁵⁴ Philoponus *Against Proclus* 1-5, 42. Bracketed words are inserted by the translator.

²⁵⁵ Philoponus *Against Proclus* 1-5, 44-6.

is assuming the second sense of actual in his argument. Philoponus thinks that this assumption is fallacious, so Proclus' argument fails.²⁵⁶

Does this distinction really help Philoponus? Grant that God is actual in the first sense: God has the capacity to create. It would seem that for God to actively use His capacities to create would involve Him undergoing some kind of change. He would go from a state of not actualizing His capacity to create, to a state of actively creating. Both Proclus and Philoponus think that a perfect God cannot change. Couldn't Proclus just reassert the point that the Christian God cannot be perfect?

Philoponus thinks not. To move from a capacity to an activity "is instantaneous. The end of not producing and the beginning of producing occur at the same instant... Therefore no time elapses between not producing and producing and, [more] generally, between [the mere possession of] any capacity and the activity [that flows] from the capacity." Since change involves time, and there is no change in activating a capacity, there is no time involved in God creating.²⁵⁷ God can create and remain changeless and timeless.

In order to avoid confusion, it should be understood that Philoponus' argument here depends on time being continuous. Time is continuous if and only if it is dense: between any two instants of time, there is a third instant of time. This is to be contrasted with discrete time where there are no instants, but instead time is composed of temporal atoms or periods of a shortest interval that cannot be further divided.²⁵⁸

Philoponus argues that there is no third instant between God's not producing and

²⁵⁶ Bonaventure makes a similar move in his *In Il Sent.* d.1, a.1,q.2. Aquinas makes a different move to this objection in *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* QII.14. Instead of drawing the distinction in actuality, Aquinas says that the divine act of knowing is perfect in itself and is distinct from the act of willing. Only the willing brings things into existence. His move then becomes very similar to Philoponus. But he then goes on to note that since God is simple, there is no real distinction between God's knowing and willing. Further, he even says that God's thoughts bring things into existence. As I shall discuss shortly, this commitment to simplicity undermines the rejoinder.

²⁵⁷ Philoponus *Against Proclus* 1-5, 54. Bracketed words are inserted by the translator.

²⁵⁸ Quentin Smith and L. Nathan Oaklander *Time, Change and Freedom: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 21.

producing. They are the same instant.²⁵⁹ Typically thinkers who hold that time is continuous or dense also hold that change is dense. This commitment to the density of change rules out the possibility of discrete changes like the passage from existence to non-existence.²⁶⁰ This seems to be what Philoponus is articulating. His argument looks as follows.

Producing and not producing are contradictories. If there were a third instant between these two contradictories one would have a time when a contradiction obtained. Since contradictions cannot obtain, there is no third intermediate instant between these two contradictory instants.²⁶¹ Therefore no time has elapsed between not producing and producing. Activity out of a capacity involves no change and thus no time.

Several quick comments on this argument are in order before moving on to my main objection. First, say that $\sim p$ obtains at time t_1 and p obtains at t_2 . Further say that time is continuous so that there is an instant between t_1 and t_2 , namely $t_{1.5}$. If it is truly *between* these two contradictory instants, then it would not be the occurrence of a contradiction. So we do have an interval of time between $\sim p$ and p . Second, I do not find it obvious that discrete changes cannot take place. It seems to me that the best example of a discrete change is the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, but I digress. The crucial issue is whether or not an activity out of a capacity involves a change.

It is not clear that an activity out of a capacity involves no change or time. Philoponus thinks that this principle applies to God and everything else, so perhaps he can provide a concrete example from everyday life to make things clear. One of his examples is that of a builder and a building. Say that the builder has the perfect

²⁵⁹ Philoponus *Against Proclus* 1-5, 54.

²⁶⁰ Robin Le Poidevin *Travels Four Dimensions: The Enigmas of Space and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 114-5.

²⁶¹ Philoponus *Against Proclus* 1-5, 54.

capacity to build. He is an actual builder. When the builder decides to build a house out of timber and stone his mind undergoes no change whatsoever, but his body and the building materials do. Somehow the movement and change befall the builder's body and the materials, but not the builder's mind. Philoponus takes this to be an actual example of the principle he has in mind: "someone who possesses a perfected capacity and then acts [in accordances with it] has not become different in any respect from his [former] self."²⁶² As such, Philoponus thinks he can employ this principle to explain God's creative activity of objects that exist at one time and not at another. He explains as follows. God

everlastingly possesses the concepts and principles of things, through which indeed he is a creator, in exactly the same way, and does not become different in any respect whether he produces or does not produce. For, speaking generally, it is not even proper to say that capacity and activity are different [things] in the case of God; the two are one and the same thing and difference arises in the sphere of that which shares [in them].²⁶³

In other words, God's activity of creation does not change Him but changes everything else. God's creative activity brings things into existence that did not previously exist. God actively sustains certain things in existence, like Socrates, and then ceases to sustain them in existence. Though it appears that this would involve God in a continual process of change, and hence God would be temporal, somehow God is not changed at all.

This is utterly baffling. It seems quite clear that the builder who decides to start building does in fact undergo change. It also seems that a God who is not creating and then creates does undergo a change. He is not standing in a causal relation to anything, and then He is standing in a causal relation to creation. Activity out of a capacity involves change and time, for it at least creates a before and after in

²⁶² Philoponus, *Against Proclus* 1-5, 62. Bracketed words are inserted by the translator.

²⁶³ Philoponus, *Against Proclus* 1-5, 62. Bracketed words are inserted by the translator.

the life of the agent. As J.R. Lucas explains, “[t]ime is the passage from possibility through actuality to unalterable necessity. The present is the unique and essential link between the possible and the unalterably necessary.”²⁶⁴ “To be an agent is to be crystallizing potentiality into actuality, thereby making it unalterable thereafter. No unalterability, no agency.”²⁶⁵ To put this in Philoponus’ terminology, for an agent to go from first sense actual to second sense actual is a temporal change. As such, Philoponus has failed to rebut Proclus’ dilemma.

If this were not enough, Philoponus’ rejoinder to Proclus fails for another reason. Note what he says in the last sentence from the quote above. “For, speaking generally, it is not even proper to say that capacity and activity are different [things] in the case of God; the two are one and the same thing.” Philoponus is demonstrating a commitment to divine simplicity: there is no composition in God. The distinction between first and second actuality does not apply to God since God is simple. This commitment to simplicity undercuts one of Philoponus’ rejoinders to Proclus. Recall earlier that Philoponus rejected Proclus’ argument because Proclus failed to make this distinction about first and second actuality. Proclus was assuming that God must be actual in the second sense, but Philoponus pointed out that God was actual in the first sense so Proclus’ argument does not go through. Yet, if God is simple, there is no meaningful distinction between first and second actuality in God. Philoponus has not defeated Proclus’ argument. The dilemma still stands.

To make matters worse, it would seem that a commitment to divine simplicity prevents one from solving any theological puzzle. What we have just seen in Philoponus is instructive. As discussed in chapter 3, take any theological puzzle where the strategy involves making clear distinctions in God. A theologian can write

²⁶⁴ J.R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality and Truth* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 8.

²⁶⁵ Lucas, *The Future*, 213.

dozens of pages making careful distinctions in order to solve the puzzle. If she is committed to divine simplicity she is forced to say that none of her distinctions apply to God at all. They are only conceptual distinctions that exist in her mind, and do not apply at all to reality. As such, her labor is in vain. It would seem that divine simplicity makes Christian theology a non-starter.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have done my best to show that divine timelessness, simplicity, and strong immutability bring absolute havoc on Christian theology when combined with presentism. If one is a presentist and a Christian, she should not believe that God is timeless, simple, or strongly immutable. Perhaps a Christian can abandon presentism in favor of four-dimensionalism in order to save the classical account of the divine perfections. This move is gaining popularity in contemporary discussions, and as such will be the subject of the next chapter. There I shall argue that four-dimensionalism is also incompatible with divine timelessness.

CHAPTER 6

DIVINE TIMELESSNESS AND FOUR-DIMENSIONALISM

It is often held today that divine timelessness is not compatible with presentism, but that it is compatible with four-dimensional eternalism. Unfortunately most of the proposals are underdeveloped. There have been many suggestions that divine timelessness is compatible with four-dimensionalism, but few have actually articulated robust models that can be adequately assessed. One common problem is that some of the models that have been put forward do not actually have a clear cut account of divine timelessness. Another common problem is a failure to understand all of the entailments of four-dimensionalism. It is almost as if people forget that four-dimensional eternalism is a theory on time and change. Thankfully at least one person, Katherin Rogers, has put forward a robust model that more fully understands the doctrine of divine timelessness and four-dimensionalism than the rest.²⁶⁶ In this chapter I will examine Rogers' model. Along the way I will note similarities and differences with others in this camp as a way to fill in some gaps in Rogers' account.

First, I wish to note the difficulties that four-dimensionalism is said to help divine timelessness overcome. In the previous two chapters I laid out various arguments that need to be dealt with. These can be summed up as four broad problems for divine timelessness. 1) As simple God cannot have accidental properties like *Creator, Redeemer, and Lord*. 2) The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Again, this was traditionally understood as there being a state of affairs where God exists alone and a

²⁶⁶ It should be noted that Rogers does not like the qualifier 'eternalism' since eternal is traditionally reserved for God. See her, "Back to Eternalism: A Response to Leftow's Anselmian Presentism," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009), 323. In personal correspondence she says that she would prefer to use "isotemporalism" instead of four-dimensionalism. Since the term 'four-dimensional eternalism' is widespread in the literature I will continue to use it so as not to cause confusion.

state of affairs where God exists with creation.²⁶⁷ The dilemma from Proclus brought out various difficulties one of which is that if God is eternal, then creation must be eternal. This rules out creation *ex nihilo*. The horn of the dilemma is that if creation is not eternal, but begins to exist, then God is temporal because creation marks a new moment in the life of God. 3) God's knowledge of the ever changing world should entail that God's knowledge changes. In contemporary discussions this falls under the question "Can God know what time it is now?" 4) Divine sustaining. God is sustaining an ever changing world and it is hard to see how He could be immutable, pure act, and timeless.

As we shall see, abandoning presentism and adopting four-dimensional eternalism does help solve some of these problems. However, I will argue that it brings up other difficulties that make the doctrine of divine timelessness untenable for Christian belief. Ultimately, I will argue that four-dimensional eternalism does not save the divine timeless research program. Instead, if four-dimensional eternalism is true, God is temporal as understood on four-dimensionalism.

Katherin Rogers' Into the Fifth Dimension

For Katherin Rogers it is no surprise that presentism is incompatible with divine timelessness. For her, atemporality entails four-dimensional eternalism.²⁶⁸ Though she claims to be doing Anselmian perfect being theology she thinks that one ought to derive her metaphysics of time from the divine perfections.²⁶⁹

T.J. Mawson agrees. He claims that one can be agnostic as to which ontology of time is correct. One should reflect on the idea of God as a perfect being, and then

²⁶⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Knowledge*, 1.48.

²⁶⁸ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 59. Also, see her "Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension," in *The Saint Anselm Journal* 32 (2006): 1-8.

²⁶⁹ Rogers, "Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God," in *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 5.

from there one can decide if presentism or four-dimensionalism is true. Whichever account gives God the greatest possible perfection, whichever one is more power-granting, is the one we should go with.²⁷⁰ As Mawson sees it, God would know more if four-dimensionalism were true, than He would if presentism were true.²⁷¹ Mawson, unlike classical theism, thinks that God's knowledge of the future depends on the future actually existing. Further, if all of time exists, then God can act directly upon it.²⁷²

This is completely contrary to the method of perfect being theology. On perfect being theology, one must start with the actual perfections found in creatures and then move to discern what the pure perfections are that God possesses.²⁷³ As Augustine put it, "What, therefore, we do not find in that which is our own best, we ought not to seek in Him who is far better than that best of ours; that so we may understand God." (*The Trinity* V.1) On this method the nature of reality sets the limits on possible perfections. The intuition is that God cannot create a world that is incompatible with who He is. Mawson's method is not helpful in this regard. For instance, it would be more power-granting if God could defy the law of non-contradiction. Thus, we should affirm that God can do such a thing. It would be more power-granting to affirm that God can change the past, thus we should affirm that the past is such that it can be altered. Someone who follows the method of perfect being theology will find such claims implausible because of the way the world is. The world

²⁷⁰ T.J. Mawson, "Divine Eternity," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 64 (2008), 41. Also, Mawson, *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43.

²⁷¹ Mawson, *Belief in God*, 43-5.

²⁷² Mawson, "God's Body," *Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006), 179.

²⁷³ Brian Leftow, "Why Perfect Being Theology?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69 (2011). Edward Wierenga, "Augustinian Perfect Being Theology and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 69 (2011). Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991). Anselm, *Proslogion*. John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures*, Q5 and Q6.

is not such that the law of non-contradiction can be broken, nor is the world such that the past is alterable. These are not metaphysical possibilities and as such they are not power-granting. Mawson would agree with this, but his method does not help one get there. I will set this issue aside for the time being.

On Rogers' account God's eternity fits together with divine simplicity, immutability, omniscience, and creation. The divine attributes are mutually entailing, though it seems to me that simplicity is the driving force in Rogers' account.²⁷⁴ Allow me to briefly sketch each attribute as Rogers sees it in order to help illuminate her account of divine eternity.

In saying that God is simple Rogers understands this claim to be that God is pure act. She takes the standard sovereignty-aseity move in order to get to the claim that God is a simple being who is not composed of parts, nor is God dependent upon anything for His existence or essential nature. God is identical to His nature and each divine attribute is identical to each other and God.²⁷⁵ In response to contemporary criticisms of divine simplicity *a la* Alvin Plantinga she says "strictly speaking God neither *has* properties nor *is* He a property... God is simply act."²⁷⁶ There are no potentialities in God for God is eternally doing all that He is. God *is* His existence as well as "His act of knowing and doing and being perfectly good" because "these are all one act."²⁷⁷ Further, one ought not to "hypothesize any unity underlying the diversity in God because there is no diversity. There is just the one, perfect act which is God."²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ In *Perfect Being Theology and The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997) she begins her discussion of the divine attributes with divine simplicity.

²⁷⁵ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 24-6.

²⁷⁶ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 27.

²⁷⁷ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 29.

²⁷⁸ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 30.

From simplicity Rogers moves into immutability and atemporal eternity. Since God is pure act, and whatever He does He does in one single eternal act, God is unchanging. Thus God is immutable and timeless.²⁷⁹ From here she notes that some within early Islamic theology held God to be temporal and immutable, but this caused problems for immutability. It “is only by postulating divine [atemporal] eternity that God’s immutability can be preserved, and with it His simplicity. If God does first one thing and then another He cannot be simple because His essence must stay the same over time, and thus be something other than the part that does the changing.”²⁸⁰

To further bolster atemporal eternity she considers the argument from the radical incompleteness of life, but she seems to notice that the argument loses its force when one accepts four-dimensional eternalism and perdurantism. “One might point out that the very reason which the medievals gave for introducing the distinction between eternity and time was to insist upon the radical transitoriness of creaturely existence in comparison to the perfection of God’s immutable mode of being, and yet if [four-dimensional] eternalism is correct and we are four-dimensional beings ever present to God, then we are not as transitory as we seem to ourselves.”²⁸¹ Yet, despite the diminished force, she seems to think that the argument still goes through. “By comparison with God who ‘possesses’ His unlimited life ‘at once’, we lead a dreadfully ‘disconnected’ life in that at each present instant we have little access to or power over all the other instants of our lives.”²⁸²

Surely she is right that perdurant beings would live an incredibly disconnected life. As she notes “I seem to myself to exist only at the present instant, but in fact the ‘I’ of an instant ago really exists and perceives an instant ago as the present instant,

²⁷⁹ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 32.

²⁸⁰ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 55-6.

²⁸¹ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 62.

²⁸² Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 62.

and the ‘I’ of an instant hence really exists and perceives an instant hence as the present instant. And these successive time-slices of ‘me’ do not have access to one another.”²⁸³ This is a radically disconnected life, and surely the life of a perfect God would not suffer from such a defect. Hence, she thinks that God must be atemporal and exist all at once.

To flesh out her account of eternity it will be helpful to look at her account of omniscience and creation. She takes the traditional claims about all moments of time existing in eternity for God differently than the classical tradition. On her account this claim does not amount to God knowing propositions or abstract states of affairs through a perfect knowledge of Himself. “The things and events *themselves* exist in divine eternity.”²⁸⁴ This is because God’s eternity acts as a fifth dimension in which the four-dimensional spacetime world exists. “Time is a fourth dimension containing all of space, and divine eternity is a sort of fifth dimension containing all of time and space.”²⁸⁵ The notion of a fifth dimension sounds a bit odd, but what Rogers is trying to express is that “all of time is equally present to God’s eternity since it is God’s eternal activity which causes it all to be.”²⁸⁶ “God is the source of each temporal instant. He is not contained in any of the temporal instants, but is directly, causally, and cognitively related to each and every one of them equally.” God’s eternity is a fifth dimension in the sense that it contains all of space and time since “God knows and acts causally upon all of space-time in one, eternal, act.”²⁸⁷

She explains that this is a form of theistic idealism. “All of space is within God’s omnipresence in that it is all immediately cognitively and causally present to

²⁸³Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism: the Presence of a Timeless God,” 7.

²⁸⁴Rogers, “Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 32 (2006), 7.

²⁸⁵Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism: the Presence of a Timeless God,” 6.

²⁸⁶Rogers, “Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension,” 2.

²⁸⁷Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism: the Presence of a Timeless God,” 8.

and absolutely dependent upon God.”²⁸⁸ “Whatever has creaturely existence in any way at all is kept in being in all its aspects from moment to moment by the power of God. God is simple and His power is His thought. For a creature to be, then, is to be thought by God. There is nothing more to a creature than what God is thinking.”²⁸⁹

All things depend for their existence on God. Since God is simple and immutable all of His actions take place at once. The divine choice to create, along with simplicity, immutability, and timelessness entail that “the created world is always present to God’s eternity. There is no point before creation at which God exists alone and then a later point at which He exists with creation.”²⁹⁰ On her account if “God eternally wills to create this world, then necessarily He eternally wills to create this world... There was never a point at which He chose to create rather than not. From eternity He chooses to create.”²⁹¹ For a simple God ‘being’ and ‘act’ are identical. Thus, “[g]iven God’s nature He could not do other than He does... God does not have literal options, but since He exists *a se* this is no limitation on Him.”²⁹² It is the case that there “are other imaginable worlds, but the actual world, from God’s perspective in eternity, and allowing for the input of free creaturely choice, is the only really possible world.”²⁹³

In order to maintain omniscience and timelessness, four-dimensional eternalism must be true. God sustains the entire space-time manifold by His one eternal thought or act. The so-called “fifth dimension” that Rogers’ posits is merely a way of expressing that God eternally sustains all times and places in one eternal act.

²⁸⁸Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism: the Presence of a Timeless God,” 9.

²⁸⁹Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 109.

²⁹⁰Rogers, “Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension,” 3.

²⁹¹Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 33.

²⁹²Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 34-5.

²⁹³Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 36.

Reaping the Benefits of Four-Dimensionalism

A few things are worthy of note before proceeding. First, Rogers' proposal avoids the common objection to divine timelessness from creation *ex nihilo*. If there is a state of affairs where God exists without creation and another where God exists with creation, God has a before and after in His life. Rogers' avoids this by making the four-dimensional world in a sense co-eternal with God. There is no state of affairs where God exists without creation, so no worry of a before and after in His life. Second, by adopting four-dimensional eternalism she avoids the problem of divine sustaining as the world unfolds through time. On presentism God sustains a moment, then ceases to sustain it, and sustains another. God would constantly be doing something different and thus not be immutable, simple, and timeless.²⁹⁴ On four-dimensionalism this is not the case. Moments of time do not slough off into the non-existent past and there are no yet-to-exist future moments. All of time exists and is sustained by God in one timeless immutable act. God can exist all at once instead of having to lose moments of His life as He would on presentism.

Third, she also avoids the problem of God's knowledge growing as the world unfolds through time. Strictly speaking, there is no unfolding through time. From God's perspective, the best perspective, the whole four-dimensional universe simply exists. There is no knowledge for God to gain. Can God know what time it is now? No, because there is no now with a unique ontological status. Granted, from the perspective of temporal creatures things appear as if the present is unique and that the past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist. This, however, is not the way reality is. Terms like 'past,' 'present,' and 'future' are relative from the perspective of temporal parts or person stages. From God's perspective, the best perspective, He sees

²⁹⁴ Rogers, "Back to Eternalism," 331.

the world as it actually is. From His perspective there is no ‘now,’ there is just the entire four-dimensional space-time world.²⁹⁵

It seems that four-dimensionalism helps avoid these common problems for divine timelessness. Does it help solve Proclus’ dilemma? Also, does it avoid the problem from accidental predication? In other words, can *Creator* be predicated of the simple God? Are there any other problems that might arise by adopting four-dimensionalism?

Leaving the Fifth Dimension Behind

There are several difficulties with Rogers’ account, and I will now spell them out. It should be noted that if four-dimensionalism is false, Rogers’ account does not work. The standard move in contemporary philosophical theology is to argue that four-dimensionalism is false so divine timelessness cannot appeal to it.²⁹⁶ Instead of taking this well trodden path, I shall argue that her account suffers from internal incoherence as well as various theological woes. I shall also argue that she offers us no good reason for thinking that God is timeless. The main reasons she offers for God being timeless are from divine simplicity and the radical incompleteness of life. She also thinks that four-dimensional eternalism must be true in order to preserve divine atemporality.²⁹⁷ If her account of divine simplicity is incoherent it will not help justify divine atemporality. Further, in adopting four-dimensional eternalism she cuts herself

²⁹⁵ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 60-4. “Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension,” 2-7. *The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation*, 209-12.

²⁹⁶ Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992). William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001). Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004).

²⁹⁷ She also offers one further reason for adopting four-dimensionalism: it reconciles divine foreknowledge and libertarian free will. I ignore this issue due to space limitations. Further, it seems to me that there are ways to reconcile foreknowledge and freedom without resorting to four-dimensionalism. Even further, I disagree that this approach solves the foreknowledge and freedom problem.

off from the argument from the radical incompleteness of life. Ultimately, four-dimensional eternalism is not compatible with divine timelessness regardless of what many contemporary thinkers say.

Proclus' Dilemma and Creation Out of Nothing

It looks as if Rogers' view falls prey to the dilemma. Creation is the result of God's thoughts. God eternally has the thoughts that bring creation into existence. So creation is co-eternal with God. For Proclus this means that creation is infinite in the past and future. This is not the case on Rogers' proposal. Her account has some subtle differences.

For Rogers, it certainly is the case that "God's thought causes things immediately and directly... There is no intermediary causes between God's thought and the created existent." Yet, unlike Proclus, Rogers does not hold to presentism. Proclus, like many others, is subject to the criticism that God's eternal acts cannot produce temporal effects since many of the effects do not yet exist and others no longer exist. By adopting four-dimensionalism Rogers avoids this. All of time simply does exist, and all of the temporal parts simply do exist at their respective times. "If something exists at time t , then the causal efficacy of God's thought is acting at time t . This most fundamental sort of cause does not precede its effect, but is contemporaneous with it."²⁹⁸ All of the four-dimensional world is contemporaneous with the timeless God who exists all at once.

This makes the world co-eternal with God for there is no state of affairs where God exists without the world. God is eternal, and God always exists with the four-dimensional world. Is this a problem? Perhaps not. When looking at the four-

²⁹⁸ Rogers, "Back to Eternalism," 328.

dimensional space-time manifold one must consider it from two perspectives. From one perspective we can see that the universe is temporally bounded in that it has a finite past, and that moments of time are chronologically ordered in earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than relations. Also, objects persist through time by having temporal parts that exist at each moment of time. Yet, from an atemporal perspective there just is the space-time manifold with all of its various temporal parts. The temporal parts do not persist through time, but are eternally existent at the times at which they exist. The universe is co-eternal with God in the sense that there is never a state of affairs when God exists and the universe does not exist. The universe is still temporally bounded, and contingent upon God. In light of this it seems that Rogers could argue that she does not fall victim to Proclus' dilemma in any damaging way.

However, one could complain that she has destroyed the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. God never exists without creation. It is co-eternal with God. God eternally exists with the four-dimensional space-time manifold. John of Damascus will not like this one bit. "For it is not natural that that which is brought into existence out of nothing should be co-eternal with what is without beginning and everlasting."²⁹⁹ For John of Damascus, like most classical theologians, creation out of nothing entails that God has not always existed with the universe. They agree with Rogers that creation is brought about by divine thought, but they hold that there is a state of affairs in which God exists alone.³⁰⁰ William Lane Craig notes that adopting four-dimensional eternalism completely destroys the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. This "emasculated

²⁹⁹ John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book I.7. Maximus the Confessor thinks it impossible that anything created could be coeternal with God. He further wonders "how are they really creatures if they are coeternal with the Creator?" *400 Chapters on Love* 4.6.

³⁰⁰ John of Scythopolis is another example of such a theologian. See, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, translated by Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 190-1, 220-1, and 238.

doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* does not do justice to the biblical data, which give us clearly to understand that God and the universe do not timelessly co-exist, but that the actual world includes a state of affairs which is God's existing alone without the universe."³⁰¹

The only move I can see for someone like Rogers is to say that the Bible does not clearly teach that creation out of nothing entails that there is a state of affairs where God exists without creation. A common stance for contemporary defenders of divine timelessness is to say that the doctrine only entails that creation is contingent upon God.³⁰² Rogers doesn't think that the doctrine tells us whether or not the universe has always existed. What it does tell us is that the universe is a unique act of God and that everything other than God is kept in existence from moment to moment by His will.³⁰³ However, this does not satisfy the Biblical data. The Bible is very comfortable talking about God existing before, and without, creation.³⁰⁴ Adopting four-dimensionalism conflicts with the Biblical teaching on creation, and this is a strike against this position on God and time.

³⁰¹ William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity: The Coherence of Theism II* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 254.

³⁰² Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time, Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 234-6. Also, Helm, "Divine Timeless Eternity," in ed. Gregory E. Ganssle, *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 47-51.

³⁰³ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 107-8.

³⁰⁴ Mt 13:35, 24:21, 25:34; Lk 11:50; Jn 17:5, 17:24; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20; Tit 1:2; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 9:6; Jude 25; Ps 90:2; Rev 13:8, 17:8. One might point out that the Jude passage is often translated as saying "before all time." True, several English translations do this, but this is not a good translation for several reasons. First, the Greek word here is *aionos* not *chronos* or *kairos*. This word is typically translated as "ages" depending on the context. Second, if the text really did mean "before all time" this would be incoherent. To talk about a state of affairs *before* time is to talk about time before time, which is nonsense. The passage in Jude should instead be translated as "before the ages" or "before this age." In this case it would mean something like God had glory even before He created the universe and began this present epoch of time. Third, translating this as "age" fits better within the eschatology of the New Testament which often speaks in terms of "this age," "the present age," and "the age to come." Further, it fits better with the eschatological tone of Jude.

Begotten Not Made?

As already noted, on four-dimensionalism creation is co-eternal with God. One might wonder what distinguishes the created universe from the only begotten Son. The Father eternally causes the Son to exist and both are co-eternal. As Gregory of Nyssa puts it in *On Not Three Gods*, “The principle of causality distinguishes, then, the Persons of the holy Trinity. It affirms that the one is uncaused, while the other depends on the cause.” The Father is uncaused, and the Son is caused. As such, the Son depends upon the Father. Yet both are co-eternal. On four-dimensionalism God eternally causes the universe to exist. As such, the universe depends upon God. Yet both are co-eternal. What is the difference between the two?

Historically, theologians distinguished between “begotten” and “made.” The term “begotten” was intended to denote “that which has a cause or source outside itself.” This causal source could be a something, or in the case of the Trinity, someone. This need not involve the begotten thing coming into existence. The term “created” or “made,” however, was intended to denote “that which has come into being.”³⁰⁵ The difference between begotten and made, then, is supposed to be that the Son never came into existence. The Son is caused to exist, but He never began to exist. The universe is caused to exist, but it did begin to exist. The Son has always existed, but the universe has not always existed.

As I have argued in earlier chapters, classical Christian theology was committed to presentism. The difference between things that are begotten and made is that things that are made are subject to temporal becoming. They did not exist, and then they come into existence. On four-dimensionalism there is no temporal

³⁰⁵ Alasdair I. C. Heron, “Homoousios with the Father,” in ed. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 60-1. See also, Michel R. Barnes, “The Background and Use of Eunomius’ Causal Language,” in eds. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

becoming. Nothing comes into existence because everything eternally exists at the times at which they exist. We now have nothing to distinguish begotten and made. This is not a good position to be in if one holds to the eternal generation of the Son.

There is a possible rejoinder. One could reject the doctrine of eternal generation. The temporalist and presentist John Feinberg has argued that eternal generation is not a biblical doctrine.³⁰⁶ One does not need it in order to be a Trinitarian. It seems obvious that a four-dimensionalist and atemporalist could make the same move. So the difficulty that I have laid out is only a problem for those who wish to affirm the doctrine of eternal generation.

Simplicity Destroys Aseity

As noted above, Rogers' account seems to be driven in large part by the doctrine of divine simplicity. If her account of divine simplicity does not work, one of the moves to divine atemporality will be cut off.

One of the strongest motivations for the doctrine of divine simplicity is the sovereignty-aseity conviction. If the doctrine of divine simplicity ends up destroying God's sovereignty and aseity it is safe to say that the doctrine should be abandoned. The driving force behind the doctrine of divine simplicity is that God's essential nature is not dependent upon anything external to God. Rogers' account of divine simplicity and creation fails to establish this.

On her account if "God eternally wills to create this world, then necessarily He eternally wills to create this world... There was never a point at which He chose to create rather than not. From eternity He chooses to create."³⁰⁷ For a simple God 'being' and 'act' are identical. Thus, "[g]iven God's nature He could not do other than

³⁰⁶ Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 489-92.

³⁰⁷ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 33.

He does...God does not have literal options, but since He exists *a se* this is no limitation on Him.”³⁰⁸ It is the case that there “are other imaginable worlds, but the actual world, from God’s perspective in eternity, and allowing for the input of free creaturely choice, is the only really possible world.”³⁰⁹

At this point several concerns might arise. For instance, how is it that God could be free in a libertarian sense if He has no options? If He does not have freedom how could He be sovereign? For Rogers, libertarian freedom does not mean the ability to do otherwise. It means that an agent is the author of her own choice.³¹⁰ This is a point of contention amongst libertarians. For now I will focus my criticism on an entailment of her account of simplicity and creation. She comes to an astonishing conclusion.

From God’s perspective, if His essence is His eternal and immutable act in this the actual and only really possible world then He could not fail to have any of His attributes and still be Himself. They are equally necessary. That means that we are forced to conclude that creatures do have some effect on God’s very essence. This seems shocking since a major motivation for insisting on simplicity is the absolute aseity of God. And now we have apparently arrived at the conclusion that He is dependent on creatures!³¹¹

Why is God dependent on creatures? Rogers specifically has in mind the libertarian freedom of created human persons.³¹² Which possible world is actualized is in part dependent on human acts. Ultimately which possible world is actual is dependent upon God’s one act which is identical to God. Part of that act includes the acts of human persons, so in this sense God is dependent on creatures. This may not be that terrible of an entailment if God desires to create human persons with free will. Most temporalists would agree. If God desires to create creatures with libertarian free will that in no way diminishes God’s sovereignty or aseity. Of course, temporalists

³⁰⁸ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 34-5.

³⁰⁹ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 36.

³¹⁰ Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 212-16.

³¹¹ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 37.

³¹² Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 48.

are also willing to say that God is contingently the Creator, Redeemer, and Lord.

These are contingent and accidental attributes that God freely takes on. Rogers cannot exactly say this. Given divine simplicity God cannot have any accidental properties.

Can she say that God is contingently the Creator? It would seem the answer is no.³¹³

“If originally He was not creating, and then He became a creator, He would become better. And there’s a difference between intending to create and creating, so if God goes from being someone who intends to create to being someone who creates He’s changed for the better. But then He does not possess perfection as a necessity of His nature.”³¹⁴

It seems that God is essentially the Creator. Since God is pure act, and all He does is done in one timeless act, He never becomes the Creator for He is eternally the Creator. If *Creator* is an essential—not a contingent—divine attribute, God must create something in order to be who He is.³¹⁵ On the type of perfect being theology that Rogers is working with there are no value-neutral potentialities or changes. All change is for the better or worse. If it is possible for God to create, He must create. Otherwise He would not be pure act. So God is dependent upon creation simpliciter in order to be who He is.

Someone like John Philoponus will see this as an unwelcome consequence of divine perfection. For Philoponus, a perfect God can exist without creation. He thinks it would be impious to say that God’s perfections depend upon creation in anyway.

Philoponus takes it as a general principle that things are perfect in themselves because of the powers that they necessarily possess, and not by external relations things stand

³¹³ It should be noted that Rogers does not deny real relations between God and creation. In fact, she finds that position difficult to hold. Rogers, “Back to Eternalism,” 336.

³¹⁴ Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism,” 10.

³¹⁵ Rogers has pointed out to me that those of a Platonic bent will see this “must create” as inevitably following from God’s perfect goodness and love. This seems to me to gut the Christian claim that creation is a gracious act of God.

in. Fire is “complete in its own being” even if nothing is around to participate in its heat. The sun would be perfect even if nothing else existed. The same is true of God who is “always a creator by virtue of his perfect possession of creative principles...For everything in existence is characterised not by the activities that proceed from it but by its essential powers.” On Rogers’s account God must create this world in order to be perfect.³¹⁶ Otherwise God would not be pure act, immutable, simple, or timeless. If God did not create this world, He would be other than He in fact is which is contrary to simplicity.³¹⁷ Philoponus thinks otherwise. “For if God cannot be perfect unless created things also exist, then his products will be perfective of the producer himself. Such, then is the situation if perfection has come to God not from his own substance but from outside.”³¹⁸

This difficulty may not be untenable for Rogers. For instance, I doubt she would accept Philoponus’ claim that capacity is actuality. Also, Rogers attempts to get out of this entailment, and admits that her account needs more work. She notes several options, one of which is to distinguish between necessary and contingent attributes in God. I take it that *being the Creator* would be a contingent attribute. However, like Philoponus, she recognizes that a commitment to divine simplicity means that there is no real distinction between God’s necessary and contingent attributes. These distinctions are only apparent from our human vantage point, and do not actually apply to God.³¹⁹ As was the case with Philoponus, these distinctions are of no help since they fail to apply to God.

³¹⁶ Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 48.

³¹⁷ Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 47.

³¹⁸ Philoponus, *Against Proclus 1-5*, 66-8. Bonaventure concurs in *Il Sent.* d.1, a.1,q.2. See also Aquinas *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.86. Of course, these thinkers are also committed to divine simplicity and pure act, so it may suffer an inconsistency.

³¹⁹ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 31-8.

It seems that the entailments are reason enough to abandon her account of divine simplicity. God's essential attributes are dependent upon creation. This has completely destroyed aseity, which is the main motivation for thinking divine simplicity is true. She now has no justification for thinking divine simplicity is true. As such, her account of divine simplicity cannot help justify divine atemporality. This is sufficient for showing that her move from simplicity to immutability and timelessness does not work.

The Threat of a Modal Collapse

The above discussion has already noted that God must create this world in order to be who He is. This brings up the threat of a modal collapse. A view suffers from a modal collapse when everything becomes necessary and all contingency is eradicated. One way of putting this is that there is only one possible world. The way the world is is the only way things could be. An easy way to avoid this is to hold that there are other possible worlds. God did not have to create and could have existed alone. Or God could have created a universe different than this one.³²⁰ Rogers account won't have any of this. "From the divine point of view things cannot be other than they in fact are. It is only the temporal and limited point of view which allows discussion of other possible worlds." Since God's perspective is the best perspective, it is the right perspective.³²¹ Things simply could not be any other way. In fact, she holds this as an entailment of divine omniscience. "The only actualizable world is the one which God eternally chooses...from the point of view of divine creativity, taking into account that God responds to our free actions, the world which God does make

³²⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

³²¹ Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 54.

must always be known to Him as the only world He ‘can’ make.”³²² In other words, from all eternity there is God and the four-dimensional universe. We limited creatures could imagine different scenarios and epistemically conceive of things differently, but these are not real metaphysical possibilities from God’s perspective, the best perspective.

What makes a modal collapse so terrible? First, it denies of God his infinite creative freedom over creation. God must necessarily exist with creation on a modal collapse. He is not free to exist without creation. This is deeply repugnant to Christian thought which has long held that God is perfect in Himself and can exist without creation. As John Webster explains, “the triune God could be without the world; no perfection of God would be lost, no triune bliss compromised, were the world not to exist; no enhancement of God is achieved by the world’s existence.”³²³ Second, a modal collapse completely eradicates creaturely freedom. Everything is necessary and nothing is contingent. The ramifications of this for the problem of evil, grace, God’s goodness, and other areas of Christian dogmatics are disastrous.

The Threat of Pantheism

Rogers’ account of simplicity and creation looks strikingly like a form of pantheism when one considers her stance on theistic idealism. Rogers does not want to align herself with pantheism given her commitment to perfect being theology and Christian doctrine. Creation, she says, does not add anything to the being of God.³²⁴

She makes claims that try to distinguish creatures from the Creator. In articulating her form of theistic idealism she says,

³²² Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 68-9.

³²³ John Webster, “Trinity and Creation,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010), 12.

³²⁴ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 113.

To be an idea of God's is not to be God or 'part of' God. As long as we maintain a distinction between the act of thinking and the object thought, we can hold that created things just are what God thinks and wills to exist in His one, perfect act which is identical to His nature, and yet that the objects of divine thought are not identical to that thought itself and hence are not God.³²⁵

Perhaps it is coherent to maintain the distinction between Creator and creature, but it is difficult to do so given her account of simplicity and idealism. If "[t]here is nothing more to a creature than what God is thinking" and God's thoughts are identical to His nature,³²⁶ how is it not the case that creatures are identical to God's nature? Further, if God's nature is identical to God Himself, how is it not the case that creatures are identical to God?

It is instructive to see Don Lodzinski's defense of divine timelessness, immutability, and simplicity.³²⁷ He concurs with Rogers that four-dimensionalism is needed to maintain timelessness. Also, he agrees that creation is co-eternal with God, and that creation is the product of God's one eternal thought. Yet, he thinks that all of this clearly entails pantheism. What is the difference between Rogers and Lodzinski? Why does one deny pantheism and the other willingly embrace it? There is a move that Rogers makes that Lodzinski does not.

Rogers attempts to avoid pantheism by placing God on a different ontological level. In earlier writings she holds that there are three ontological levels, yet in later writings the third one seems to have disappeared. The big idea is that God is on one ontological level. Everything that exists apart from God are divine ideas, or reflect the divine ideas, and are thus on a second ontological level. As created beings our ideas

³²⁵ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 111.

³²⁶ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 109.

³²⁷ Don Lodzinski, "The Eternal Act," *Religious Studies* 34 (1998), 325-352. Cf. John Leslie, *Infinite Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Leslie's pantheistic model also looks strikingly similar to Roger's model of the God-world relation.

are copies of the divine ideas and are thus inferior. They exist on a third ontological level.³²⁸

I must confess that I do not understand the notion of different ontological levels. This is because existence does not admit of degrees or levels. A thing either exists or does not exist. Granted, God exists necessarily and creatures exist contingently. The modality of each is different, but existence is basic and univocal to each. What would it mean for there to be different ontological levels?

In order to make her position clear Rogers asks us to consider our own minds. In our own minds we can distinguish between our mind and our thoughts. In an analogous way we can distinguish between the divine mind and His thought (which is creation). “We must distinguish the ontological level of the mind where the thinking goes on, and the ontological level of the ideas sustained by the thinking. The process of thinking is not exactly the same thing as the idea which exists as the object of thought....The mind is not just the same thing as its ideas and vice versa.”³²⁹

Does this really clear up the notion of different ontological levels? The thinking mind exists and brings certain thoughts into existence. The mind and the thoughts both exist. Granted, the thoughts are dependent upon the mind for their existence, but so what? The mind and the thoughts both exist. When one takes stock of her ontological inventory she will count the mind and the thoughts, and place both of them in the category of things that exist. She can then go on to give a metaphysical description of what each thing in her ontological inventory is like, but that does not bring in the idea of different ontological levels. There is one world—a maximally compossible state of affairs—that is made up of all the things that exist. The analogy

³²⁸ Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 230 and 238.

³²⁹ Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach*, 239-40.

that Rogers has offered has not given us a way to understand the concept of different ontological levels.

Perhaps she doesn't need the notion of different ontological levels in order to avoid pantheism. Maybe the analogy she has offered is enough to distinguish God and creatures. The analogy does appear to be intuitive. Our minds are not identical to our thoughts. Say I am at a restaurant and have to figure out how much to tip the server. This puts me in the awkward position of having to do math in my head. My mind clearly exists before I engage in the mathematical thought process, and it continues to exist once I have ceased to think about the tip. My mind is not identical to my thought about the tip.

Is this a good analogy for thinking about God's mind? Not if God is simple. My thoughts are not identical to who I am. They are things I do, but not things I am. With the simple God, His thought is identical to His essence. God just is His act of thinking. If God were not simple, immutable, and timeless this analogy would be apt, but it cannot help Rogers. As it stands, it appears that Rogers' account entails pantheism.

What Perfections Can Be Derived From Four-Dimensionalism?

Earlier I noted that Rogers and Mawson wished to move from divine perfections to the metaphysics of time. I also noted that this is going about perfect being theology in the wrong order. The methods of perfect being theology start with the assumption that God can be known from the perfections found in creatures. If the world is a four-dimensional space-time manifold and creatures are perdurant objects, what perfections can be derived from this? It does not appear to be anything like divine atemporality, simplicity, or immutability.

If creatures are perdurant beings it would seem that the perfection to be derived would be divine perdurantism. One certainly cannot derive the perfection of infinite endurance from perdurant creatures. The Anselmian argument from the radical incompleteness of life assumes that creatures are endurant beings—they exist as a whole or all at once. It further assumes that enduring through time is better than not. The next move is to predicate that endurance through time can be had to an infinite degree. Hence, God has infinite duration, or endures without beginning or end. The next step is to try to argue that it is better to be without a before and after than to have a before and after in one's life. As noted in chapter 3, this is where divine simplicity comes into play. In particular, the claim that conceptual distinctions do not apply to God. This is the point where the various forms of the argument get a bit fuzzy and make some odd jumps, but the end result is supposed to be a God who exists all at once in a timeless present that lacks a before and after.

If human persons are perdurant beings, the argument will look different. It will have to assume that perduring through time is better than not. The question will then be can perdurance through time be had to an infinite degree? Let us say that it can be. In that case God would have an infinite perdurance which means that He would have an infinite number of temporal parts or stages. If God has temporal parts, He is not simple, immutable, or timeless. No defender of the traditional view of God will take delight in this entailment. Assuming four-dimensional eternalism and perdurantism does not lead to divine timelessness. It leads to a perdurant God.

There is a further problem in assuming four-dimensional eternalism. The argument from the radical incompleteness of life not only assumes endurantism, it also assumes presentism. The life of creatures is transitory precisely because creatures lose moments of their lives as the present moment slips into the non-existent past, and

they do not yet possess the non-existent future moments of their lives. The argument hinges on presentism and endurantism. If one rejects these metaphysical doctrines, she is cutting herself off from one of the main arguments for divine timelessness.

Four-dimensional eternalism will not get the job done. On Rogers' account God is eternally creating and sustaining the four-dimensional space-time manifold. There never was a moment when God existed and the world did not. The world simply is not transitory on this view. It is contingent because its' existence depends upon God, but it is co-eternal with God. In adopting this view on time Rogers and Mawson have cut themselves off from one of the main arguments for divine timelessness.

Four-Dimensionalism Does Not Save Divine Timelessness

Many defenders of divine temporality have claimed that the only way to maintain divine timelessness is to hold to four-dimensional eternalism.³³⁰ Atemporalists like Paul Helm, Mawson, and Rogers agree. However, this is false. God would be temporal in the way that a four-dimensionalist understands time.

It seems that the reason that contemporary philosophical theologians have claimed that four-dimensional eternalism is compatible with divine atemporality stems from the notion that this view of time involves an unchanging reality. On presentism it is obvious that the world is constantly changing. If God is sustaining this constantly changing world He cannot be immutable for He can only sustain objects that exist at the ever changing present moment. On four-dimensionalism it might appear that the world is unchanging since all moments of space and time have equal

³³⁰For instance, Alan Padgett, William Lane Craig, and Garrett DeWeese all work with this assumption. John Polkinghorne also makes passing references to this in several of his papers.

ontological existence, and the flow of time is said to be illusory. As such, God can sustain the world in one eternal and immutable act.

The problem is that this is a false understanding of this theory of time. As Nathan Oaklander explains, “The rock-bottom feature of time that must be accepted on all sides is that there is *change*, and the different views concerning the nature of change constitute the difference between A- and B-theories of time.”³³¹ To hold to four-dimensional eternalism is not to hold to a changeless world. Instead, it is to hold to a different understanding of change—i.e. perdurantism. The world involves change from one moment of time to the next. Perdurantism is the way four-dimensionalists explain how an object changes over time without having contradictory temporary intrinsic properties. As such, even on four-dimensional eternalism, God is sustaining a changing world.

In this section I shall lay out several reasons for thinking that four-dimensionalism does not save divine timelessness.

The Timeless God Exists At Every Time

Mawson’s account of divine timelessness falls into divine temporality. God, on his construal, is temporal as understood on four-dimensionalism. This is not intentional. He does attempt to distinguish his account from divine temporality. I will argue that he does not succeed.

On his model, much like Anselm’s, God’s relation to time is directly parallel to God’s relation to space. “God is not located at any particular point in time, in the sense that he exists then but not at other times. Rather, he transcends time. Despite his

³³¹Nathan Oaklander, *The Ontology of Time* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 39. Emphasis in the original.

temporal transcendence, he is not absent from any time.”³³² He notes that the temporalist will agree with this assessment, and as such he has not clearly distinguished timelessness from temporality. What distinguishes the two positions? “The answer is that the atemporalist believes that if God had not created a universe, he would have existed at no time for there wouldn’t have been time, whereas the temporalist believes that even if God had not created the universe, he would have existed at times, indeed at all times, for there would still have been time.”³³³

Is this enough to distinguish divine atemporality from temporality? The temporalist should say no. On the Anselmian view God exists at all times and places.³³⁴ This means that God is causally related to each moment of time. He exists at those times. If He did not, those times would not exist. This, says Mawson, is sufficient for God to exist at every time. “It is a sufficient condition of one’s being at a particular time that one knows what is going on at that time directly, without first needing to do something at some other time, and that one can act directly at that time, that is without first needing to do something at some other time.”³³⁵ At this point, the divine temporalist will say that to exist at a time is a sufficient condition to be in time.³³⁶ Thus, Mawson’s account does not give us divine timelessness. If God exists at any time, He must be temporal.

Mawson will disagree for two reasons. First, his appeal, again, is that if God had not created the temporal world He would not exist at any time.³³⁷ This is irrelevant since God has in fact created a temporal world and exists at every time.

³³² Mawson, *Belief in God*, 49.

³³³ Mawson, *Belief in God*, 49.

³³⁴ Anselm, *Monologion*, 22.

³³⁵ Mawson, *Belief in God*, 50.

³³⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “God and Time,” *Philosophia Christi* 2, (2000), 8. This is why Paul Helm, in his defense of timelessness, claims that God cannot stand in any temporal relations, not even simultaneity. Helm, *The Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27.

³³⁷ Mawson, *Belief in God*, 50. Also, “God’s Body,” 180.

Further, as noted above, on Mawson's account God has always existed with the temporal world. There never was a state of affairs where God did not exist at all times. Second, Mawson claims, like Anselm, that existing at every time is not sufficient for existing in time.³³⁸ He gives us no hint as to how this is the case. Thus, we have no reason to think this claim is true.

In fact, this is a problem for many atemporalists. There is a widespread assumption amongst atemporalists that there is a clear distinction between existing *at* a time and existing *in* time, or between existing *with* a time and *in* time. As Rory Fox points out, this distinction was taken to be obvious throughout the Middle Ages, but was left vague and largely unexplored.³³⁹ This distinction is not obvious. I dare say it is empty. To exist *at* a time is to have temporal location. To exist *in* time is to have temporal location. Having temporal location makes one temporal. What is the difference between *at* and *in*?

The atemporalist wants to draw the distinction by saying that eternity contains time in that "God is the source of each temporal instant. He is not contained in any of the temporal instants, but is directly, causally and cognitively related to each and every one of them equally."³⁴⁰ The temporalist agrees, but she understands eternity as metaphysical time as outlined in chapter 2.

How can the atemporalist distinguish herself from the temporalist? What metaphysic of time makes this distinction between *at* and *in* time intelligible? There does not appear to be one. If the absolute theory of time is true, time can exist without change. There is no distinction between existing *at* a time and existing *in* time. Nothing can be timeless if the absolute theory of time is true for it is a necessary

³³⁸ Mawson, *Belief in God*, 50.

³³⁹ Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 311 and 324-7. Fox also notes that Aquinas was willing to concede that angels who exist *with* time must be *in* time. However, Aquinas was not willing to concede this in respect to God.

³⁴⁰ Rogers, "Anselmian Eternalism," 8.

concomitant of God's existence. Several divine temporalists will be happy with this, but it will not help divine timelessness. If a relational theory of time is true, time is just change. There is no meaningful sense in which an object exists *at* a change but not *in* a change. An object persists through change by either enduring or perduring. An object either does or does not change. The atemporalist will say that God does not change intrinsically or extrinsically. Below I will argue that this is not possible. For now I will simply note that this does not make the at-in distinction intelligible.

What seems to be going on with the at-in distinction is a strong analogy between space and time, but even the most ardent four-dimensionalist will note that space and time have clear distinct qualities. For instance, time has a direction and space does not. The at-in distinction assumes that time is like a container, but time just is not the sort of thing that could be a container.³⁴¹ It is not enough like a physical object to be described literally in this manner.³⁴² Granted, temporalists do speak of God existing *in* time, but this is a loose way of saying that God is temporal.

One common move to make the at-in distinction work is to say that time is created by God. God cannot be bound by created things. Does this help? No. First, say that time is created. Time is either relational or absolute. No progress has been made over the above difficulties by making time a created thing. Second, it isn't obvious that time was created. For instance, John of Damascus held to a period of indivisible time prior to creation. There needs to be a reason for thinking that time was created. Augustine posits that God created time to respond to the Manichaean question, "Why

³⁴¹ Lesley-Anne Dyer, "Transcendent and Immanent Eternity in Anselm's *Monologium*," *Filosofia Unisinos* 11 (2010), 275-78. Dyer notes the difficulties surrounding the metaphor of time as a container.

³⁴² On the absolute theory of time one can describe time as a container in a very loose sense. As already noted, this does not help the atemporalist.

did God not create sooner?”³⁴³ It is an ad hoc move that one need not accept.³⁴⁴ One will need independent justification for making this claim. One could offer a kalam argument to the conclusion that time had a beginning. However, this would get us to the conclusion that there was a first change which is consistent with John of Damascus’ position. It cannot get us to the conclusion that time began for there could be a single moment of amorphous time prior to creation that contains no changes.³⁴⁵ One will need another argument for the conclusion that time began.

As it stands the timeless God exists at every time and thus has temporal location. That is sufficient for God to be temporal.

The Arguments Against Timelessness Work on Four-Dimensionalism

To bolster the conclusion above it is worthy of note that some of the arguments against divine timelessness work on presentism and four-dimensional eternalism. John Duns Scotus argued against Thomism that God cannot be co-present, or immense, with an event unless that event exists.³⁴⁶ In other words, God cannot be equally co-present with all moments of time because moments of time only exist at the times at which they do. Scotus was assuming presentism, so his claim is that God can only be co-present with the present moment. God cannot be co-present with any other moments because those other moments simply do not exist on presentism.

³⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions* XI.13. Maximus the Confessor simply declares that we are not allowed to ask that question. *400 Chapters on Love* 4.3-5.

³⁴⁴ If the temporalist is bothered by the question she has several moves she can make. See Thomas Senor, “Divine Temporality and Creation ex Nihilo” *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993). Also, Dean Zimmerman, “God Inside Time and Before Creation,” in ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁴⁵ DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 176, 269-73.

³⁴⁶ Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom: Lectura I 39* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 174.

However, Brian Leftow briefly suggests that the same argument could work on four-dimensional eternalism.³⁴⁷

On eternalism objects are constituted of temporal parts or stages. Stages only exist at the moments at which they exist. Some object O has stages at times t_1 through t_n . It simply is the case that those stages exist at those times and no others. The whole notion of perdurant objects and stages arises because endurant objects cannot exist at multiple times as the four-dimensionalist sees it. Since all moments of time have equal ontological existence an endurant object would exist wholly at several times and would thus have contradictory intrinsic properties. Say O exists as a whole at t_1 through t_2 . At t_1 O is blue all over and at t_2 O is red all over. Since O exists as a whole at both times the properties of each time fall within O's quantifier domain. O has the properties *blue all over* and *red all over*. O has contradictory properties. As discussed in chapter 2, the adoption of perdurantism removes the contradictory properties.

What does this have to do with God and time? One may recall that for God to be immense, or omnipresent, is for God to be “wholly present” to all of space and time by being directly, causally, and cognitively related to all of space and time.³⁴⁸ Further, recall that a simple God is identical to His act of knowing and sustaining the universe. If God is immense, or wholly present, to all moments of time as the four-dimensional eternalist sees it, God will have contradictory intrinsic properties. From all eternity God is incarnate and not incarnate. From all eternity God is initiating the Mosaic Covenant and He is not. Since God is equally and wholly present at each moment of time, and since each moment of time has equal ontological existence, all of these properties are within the quantifier domain in that all of these properties can be predicated of God. In order to remove the contradiction one would have to adopt

³⁴⁷ Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 229.

³⁴⁸ Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 59.

divine perdurance so that she could say that <at time t_n God is incarnate> and <at time t_x God is not incarnate>. Again, no defender of divine simplicity will accept that for God literally has temporal parts. If God has temporal parts, He is not timeless.

Rogers may have a rejoinder. In one place she writes, “Although God is ‘timeless’ in that His life is not stretched out four-dimensionally across time as our lives are, it does not follow that He is incapable of being related to the temporal universe... God knows and acts causally upon all of space-time in one, eternal, act.” Here she is clearly denying that God is spread out through the spacetime manifold. Yet, God is still causally related to each moment of time. He is “the source of each temporal instant.”³⁴⁹ God is the source of each instant by being cognitively and causally related to each instant. Does this help? No. A simple God is identical to His cognition and His cognition is temporally spread out. Thus, God is temporally spread out. His act of causing t_1 to exist only exists at t_1 and not at t_2 .

There is one way to avoid this conclusion, but the atemporalist will not like it. The atemporalist could appeal to a claim that she is already committed to: all of time is simultaneously present to God. All of time is simultaneous with eternity. Time t_1 is simultaneous with eternity. Time t_2 is simultaneous with eternity. Thus, t_1 is simultaneous with t_2 . This has the advantage of clearly making God’s causal activity one single act. Of course, it has the high price of collapsing the chronology of time and thus destroying four-dimensionalism. As I said before, this avoids the problem, but the atemporalist will not like it.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God,” 8.

³⁵⁰Leftow suggests another option in *Time and Eternity*, 230-5. Drawing on an analogy from STR he says that times are co-present to God in His eternal reference frame. On one interpretation of this he will be subject to the argument above. God’s reference frame will be the preferred reference frame, and thus the one that defines absolute simultaneity. On another interpretation this amounts to the claim that all objects have two modes of existence: an eternal and a temporal mode. I am in agreement with Rogers in that I cannot make sense of this. See her, “Back to Eternalism,” 324.

There is another argument worth considering that comes from Dean Zimmerman and Roderick M. Chisholm. Their argument explicitly endorses presentism, but I believe that it works on four-dimensionalism as well. One of the starting points for the argument is that God stands in real relations to creation. As noted before, Rogers has no taste for the Medieval denial of God's relation to creation. Zimmerman and Chisholm argue that if God stands in a relation with temporal entities He too must be temporal. "If anything changes, then everything changes. If you change from the state of sitting to the state of standing, then each of us becomes such that you change from the state of sitting to the state of standing. And so does God."³⁵¹

What Zimmerman and Chisholm are describing are Cambridge changes. A Cambridge change is a relational, or extrinsic, change. It is not the same thing as an intrinsic change. If person *P* decides to perform some action *a*, and then performs *a*, *P* will have undergone an intrinsic change. If a red apple turns brown it has undergone an intrinsic change. A Cambridge change is different because it does not involve a change in something intrinsic to the subject. Let us say that there is a tree in the middle of a forest. At time t_1 there is a squirrel standing south of the tree. At time t_2 the squirrel moves and stands north of the tree. The squirrel has undergone an intrinsic change, but the tree has not. The tree has only undergone a mere Cambridge change.

What does this have to do with God and time? Zimmerman and Chisholm are arguing that a subject that has undergone a Cambridge change is in time. The tree was standing in a relation to the squirrel at t_1 and then was standing in a new relation at t_2 . God is eternally sustaining both of those times. He stands in a real relation to this

³⁵¹ Roderick M. Chisholm and Dean Zimmerman, "Theology and Tense", *Nous* 31:2 (1997): 264.

Cambridge change. It would seem that God would be subject to a Cambridge change as well since He is really related to both times. If God undergoes a mere Cambridge change, He is temporal.

One could try to get out of this by denying that Cambridge changes should even count as changes at all.³⁵² I find this less than persuasive since Cambridge changes are enough to change propositions about other subjects. One will need to offer an argument as to why they are not legitimate changes. Ultimately, that does not matter since Christian theology proclaims that God stands in several types of relations with creation that are far more significant than mere Cambridge change. He created and sustains the world. The world is causally dependent upon Him, so the world is in a dependency relation with God at each moment of its existence. Also, God through Christ and the Holy Spirit stands in an intimate loving relationship with human persons. These are not mere Cambridge changes.

Anything related to a time is in time. Anything related to a change is also changed. Four-dimensional eternalism is a theory on time and change. Time and change are part of the furniture of the world. God is related to a temporal and changing world, as understood on four-dimensionalism, so God is temporal as understood on four-dimensionalism. This brings us back to a perdurant God.

Concluding Remarks

In the previous chapter I argued that the traditional view of divine atemporality is not possible given presentism. Here I examined a contemporary account of divine timelessness that assumes four-dimensional eternalism. I have argued that this account fails to maintain divine timelessness as well. Katherin Rogers

³⁵² Leftow, "Eternity and Immutability" in ed. William E. Mann *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

has said that unless divine timelessness “entails some logical or metaphysical impossibility” Christians ought to hold to this doctrine since it expresses “the most ontologically perfect way to exist.”³⁵³ What I am positing is that divine timelessness is metaphysically impossible given that God has created a temporal world. It does not matter which theory of time one holds. We know that God has created a temporal world and that He causally sustains this world and interacts in it, and as such God must be temporal.

³⁵³Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism,” 11-12.

CHAPTER 7

THE INCARNATION OF THE TIMELESS GOD

Formerly he was not man, but only God the Son, before all ages, unconnected with a body or anything corporeal; but at last he became man also, assuming manhood for our salvation; passible in the flesh, impassible in the Godhead; limited in the body, unconfined in the spirit; on the earth and at the same time in heaven; belonging to the visible world, and also to the intelligible order of being; comprehensible and also incomprehensible; so that man as a whole, since he had fallen into sin, might be fashioned afresh by one who was wholly man and at the same time God.

—Gregory of Nazianzus³⁵⁴

the *assumptio carnis* also means that the eternal God, without ceasing to be eternal, has taken *temporal form*, as well as creaturely existence. God has assumed our time into union with himself, without abrogating it. He the eternal has become temporal for us in the form of our own temporal and historical existence, not simply by embracing our time and historical existence and ruling it, but by permitting time and our historical existence to be the form of his eternal deity. Thus he is not only accessible to us in time and history, but we in time and history are free to approach the eternal and to live with him.

—T.F. Torrance³⁵⁵

It is often said that the incarnation conflicts with divine timelessness, though this is seldom fleshed out in the contemporary discussions. The intent of this chapter is to find if there is a way for the incarnation to be compatible with divine timelessness. First, we need to get a clear statement of the conflict. Then we need to find a model that is possibly compatible with timelessness. I will argue that there are no existent models. Since the incarnation is part of the hardcore of every Christian research program, it is a non-negotiable doctrine. Divine timelessness does not have the same status as the doctrine of the incarnation. As such, Christians should give up the divine timeless research program in order to maintain the incarnation.

³⁵⁴ *Epistle* 101.4-7, 10.

³⁵⁵ Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 66.

The Initial Objection

It should be recalled that all one needs is a change, any kind of change, in order to have time. Any kind of change that a being undergoes will be sufficient for that being to be temporal. The incarnation seems to be a clear example of God the Son undergoing a change, and thus being temporal. As Colin Gunton puts it, “the eternal love of God locates itself in time and space, and so becomes datable.”³⁵⁶ Yet, Christians have traditionally wished to resist the claim that this entails that God is temporal. In speaking of the incarnate Christ, Pope Leo I says that “[w]hile continuing to be beyond time, he begins to exist from a point in time.”³⁵⁷ This appears to be highly paradoxical.

It is not surprising the doctrine of the incarnation was theologically offensive in the ancient world. The notion that the immutable God could change was an offense against His perfection. The suggestion that the timeless God could enter into time—let alone be aware of what is happening in time—is an assault on the most exalted being.³⁵⁸ It was an uphill battle for early Christians to establish the intellectual credibility of the incarnation. As Christianity became the dominant religion in the West, the critics did not go away. Christian theologians continued to feel compelled to answer objections against the compatibility of God’s perfection and the incarnation.³⁵⁹ A common objection was that it is unfitting for God to become anything which He

³⁵⁶ Colin E. Gunton, *Yesterday and Today, Second Edition* (London: SPCK, 1997), 134.

³⁵⁷ Pope Leo I in ed. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 149.

³⁵⁸ Many of the early Christological heresies were motivated by the *prima facie* incompatibility of divine timelessness, immutability, impassability and the incarnation. David Bentley Hart, “No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassability,” *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002). See also the “Deposition of Arius” in ed. Philip Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume 4: Athanasius: Select Works and Letters* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 271-9.

³⁵⁹ Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* is a classic example. As is Gregory of Nyssa’s *On Religious Instruction*.

was not eternally. The incarnation is a new event in history, it is not eternal. As such, God cannot have become incarnate at some point in history.³⁶⁰

These objections were common because it was assumed that God is atemporal. The incarnation was on trial before the bar of the classical understanding of divine perfection. In our own day the objections usually run the other direction. The classical understanding of the divine perfections is placed on trial before the bar of God incarnate. This is as it should be if we truly believe that the incarnation is the ultimate revelation of God to human persons.³⁶¹ The incarnation should force us to reconsider what God is like.³⁶²

There are several ways of articulating the objection. Thomas Senor puts it like this.³⁶³

- 1) Jesus Christ was the bearer of temporal properties.
- 2) No bearer of temporal properties is atemporal.
- 3) Jesus Christ=God the Son (a divine person).
- 4) God the Son is not atemporal.

Brian Leftow states the problem as follows, displaying a clear understanding of the role change plays in the argument:³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ G.R. Evans, *Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1993), 97.

³⁶¹ Richard A. Holland Jr., *God, Time, and the Incarnation*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012), chapter 2.

³⁶² Alan Torrance, "Does God Suffer? Incarnation and Impassibility," in eds., Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell, *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1989), 352.

³⁶³ Thomas D. Senor, "Incarnation, Timelessness, and Leibniz's Law Problems," in eds. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 220.

³⁶⁴ Brian Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," in eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins, *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). One will notice that I do not engage Leftow below. I have chosen not to do so for several reasons. First, on Leftow's model God the Son is not identical to Jesus Christ. He denies (6). This is not an adequate account of the incarnation for the early creeds clearly say that the Son is the exact same person as Jesus. Second, I simply do not understand how Leftow's metaphysical model is supposed to work. It is heavily dependent upon an analogy (that of a diver in a wet suit), and light on transparent metaphysics. I do not understand how to assign a truth value to the claims that Leftow's model makes. As it stands the account is underdeveloped and could

- 5) Jesus Christ existed in time.
- 6) Jesus Christ=God the Son.
- 7) God the Son existed in time.
- 8) God the Son began to be human.
- 9) Whatever begins to be human changes intrinsically.
- 10) God the Son changed intrinsically.
- 11) Whatever changes intrinsically exists in time.
- 12) God the Son exists in time.

Senor notes that this doesn't necessarily entail that the entire Godhead is temporal. "It does follow, however, that there exists a temporal divine being and, *a fortiori*, atemporality is not essential for divinity."³⁶⁵ Senor's modesty here ignores some important issues in Trinitarian theology. This would entail that all of the divine persons are temporal since all of the divine persons necessarily and essentially stand in a perichoretic relation to one another. If one divine person becomes temporal, the others do too because of the interpenetrating relation that they stand in to each other.

The temporality of the incarnation is a serious threat to divine timelessness. "[I]f God is timelessly eternal, then there can be no *time* at which the Word of God can be said to do or become anything."³⁶⁶ This would seem to make it impossible for a timeless God to become incarnate, but the incarnation is an essential part of any

be subject to two fatal problems: (i) Jesus Christ is not a person, or (ii) Nestorianism. Third, I fail to see how it can account for the *communicatio idiomatum*. In fact, Leftow never even mentions the *communicatio idiomatum*. Nor does he offer a detailed discussion of how the two natures are supposed to relate to one another. Fourth, because of the previous reason I fail to see how it is not Nestorianism. If it is not Nestorianism, it does not seem to be an incarnation of any sort. For an extended articulation and defense of this model see Brian Leftow, "The Humanity of God," and Oliver D. Crisp, "Compositional Christology Without Nestorianism," and for a critique see Thomas P. Flint, "Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation?" and Thomas Senor, "Drawing on Many Traditions: An Ecumenical Kenotic Christology," in ed. Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Also, Brian Leftow, "Composition and Christology," *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011).

³⁶⁵ Senor, "Incarnation, Timelessness, and Leibniz's Law Problems," 220.

³⁶⁶ Oliver Crisp, "Incarnation," in eds. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168.

Christian research program. The atemporalist needs to offer a model of the incarnation that is compatible with divine timelessness if she is going to have a coherent Christian research program. There might be a way to develop a model where this is possible. This will be examined below.

Christological Models

There are various models of the incarnation at large today.³⁶⁷ The dominant strands are composite Christologies.³⁶⁸ This can involve two, three, or four parts of the composite Christ depending on one's anthropology. For instance, the two-minds view is a three part Christology since it posits that Christ has a divine mind, a human mind, and a human body.³⁶⁹ Someone who is a substance dualist may find this attractive. However, she may also find a two part Christology equally attractive. This is where the divine mind constitutes a human person by being connected to a human body in the appropriate way, perhaps through some sort of psycho-physical laws.³⁷⁰ A trichotomist will most likely have a four part Christology since she holds that human persons are comprised of a body, soul, and spirit. (Or in the case of Apollinaris a body, a rational soul, and an animal soul. Although, he had a three part Christology since, on his view, the Son takes the place of the rational soul and thus counts as fully

³⁶⁷ I will be following the taxonomy of incarnation models that Oliver Crisp uses in *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁶⁸ Anna Marmodor and Jonathan Hill, "Composition Models of the Incarnation: Unity and Unifying Relations," *Religious Studies* 46 (2010).

³⁶⁹ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (London: Cornell University Press, 1986).

³⁷⁰ William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), chapter 30. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 9. However, Swinburne offers a variant of the two-minds view by dividing the Word's consciousness.

human.³⁷¹) In this instance, the divine mind would take on a human body, a human soul, and a human spirit.³⁷²

Closely related to this is the question of the divine and human will.

Monothelites hold that the Son only has one will, whereas dyothelites hold that the Son has two wills—a human and a divine will.³⁷³ A monothelite will say that only persons have a will, whereas a dyothelite will maintain that natures have a will.³⁷⁴ Since Christ took on a human nature, He must have taken on a human will as well. What might this look like? Say one has a three part Christology and is a dyothelite. On this view God the Son—a divine mind—assumes a human mind, a human body, and a human will.

There are other Christological models available as well. There are two broad kenotic positions that one might hold. These can be compatible with three and four part Christologies, though one need not hold them in order to flesh out a kenotic account. A *functional* kenotic view holds that the Second divine Person limited the

³⁷¹ Apollinaris says, “If, then, a human being is made up of three parts, the Lord is also a human being, for the Lord surely is made up of three parts: spirit and soul and body.” Norris, *Christological Controversy*, 110.

³⁷² I should also add the possibility of a materialist Christology. If someone holds to a physicalist anthropology she could argue that God the Son became purely physical in the incarnation. Trenton Merricks, “The World Made Flesh: Dualism, Physicalism, and the Incarnation,” in eds. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, *Persons: Human and Divine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). However, this is not possible. Robin Le Poidevin says that Merricks’ position is a non-starter since it involves an immaterial person becoming wholly material. Le Poidevin, “The Incarnation: Divine Embodiment and the Divided Mind,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 68 (2011), 276. A physicalist could say that the Son does not need to become wholly material, but instead be appropriately related to a human organism. In this instance we would have a clear cut case of a divine mind interacting with a physical human body. This is a two part Christology. It is also a great example of an immaterial mind interacting with a physical body. So much for the interaction objection to substance dualism.

³⁷³ Oliver Crisp, “Incarnation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 162-3.

³⁷⁴ John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book III.14. For John of Damascus, and most classical orthodox Christians, there is only one divine will. This raises a particular problem for any account of the incarnation. How can the actions of Jesus be truly predicated of the Son? It would seem that if there is only one divine will, all of the actions of Jesus can be truly predicated of the entire Godhead. But this cuts against the traditional claim that only the Son is incarnate. I will ignore this problem for the purposes of this chapter, but it seems that what is needed is Social Trinitarianism whereby we have three divine persons, each with a distinct will. For more on this see Richard Cross, “Vehicle Externalism and the Metaphysics of the Incarnation: A Medieval Contribution,” in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 201-3.

exercise of His powers to such an extent that He constitutes a human person.³⁷⁵ The Son does not give up any of His essential attributes in the incarnation. He simply limits the exercise of His attributes. An *ontological* kenosis view holds that the Son does give up His omni-attributes in the incarnation in order to be considered human.³⁷⁶ This view, at least the plausible versions of it, will also try to maintain that the Son does not give up any of His essential attributes. A proponent of this view will argue that an attribute like omnipotence is not necessary for being divine, but that love is. The Son gives up omnipotence, but does not give up love.

Which type of model will help us maintain divine timelessness? The kenotic views will be of no help since the very idea of kenosis involves giving something up. A timeless God cannot give up anything for that would involve change and a new moment in the divine life. On an ontological kenosis the Son loses certain properties at a particular time, and that certainly cannot be compatible with divine timelessness. A functional view holds that for a particular stretch of time the Son does not exercise certain divine powers. Such a view has already given up the idea that God is pure act, and instead holds that God can act or refrain from acting at particular times. This is certainly not congenial with atemporality as it involves real change in God.³⁷⁷

What about a composite model? It is not clear how a two part monothelite Christology will work. The Son becomes connected to a body through psycho-physical laws and the divine will acts at particular times. The Son becomes causally connected to a body at a particular time, and He was not always causally connected to

³⁷⁵ Thomas D. Senor, "God, Supernatural Kinds, and the Incarnation," *Religious Studies* 27 (1992). Keith E. Yandell, "Some Problems for Tomistic Incarnationists," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 30 (1991).

³⁷⁶ See Stephen T. Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapter 10. C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology," in eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins, *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*. Also, Peter Forrest, "The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis," in ed. Micheal Rea, *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume 1: Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁷⁷ Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 121.

a body, lest we hold that the incarnation is timeless. Perhaps a three part dyothelite Christology is the best option. In fact, it appears to be the majority view after the seventh century.³⁷⁸ For instance, one of the reasons the Third Council of Constantinople affirmed a three part dyothelite Christology was to maintain that the divine nature did not change or suffer in the incarnation.³⁷⁹ This is the view that I shall examine throughout the rest of this chapter. Before doing so, I need to lay out a few preliminary issues.

First, one might complain that I am ignoring the trichotomist position and a four part Christology. In fact, I am doing this for at least two reasons. (1) The trichotomist position has not had many major contenders in Church history. Nor am I aware of any contemporary trichotomists who have sufficiently fleshed out the incarnation in light of divine timelessness. (2) If it is possible for a three part Christology to maintain divine timelessness, a trichotomist can easily reap the benefits of this view and tack on a human spirit. It is not obvious what the human spirit would do that a human soul cannot do, nor how adding a human spirit would help solve the problem of a timeless God incarnate. Regardless, if a three part Christology can uphold divine timelessness, so can a four part Christology.

Second, an overwhelming majority of Christians have been presentists and endurantists. Very few have been four-dimensionalists and perdurantists until recent times. As such, there are not many models of the incarnation cut in terms of four-dimensionalism. I will do my best to construct a composite Christology on both accounts, but it will be difficult since there has not been much reflection on the impact

³⁷⁸ Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 49 ff. Also, Crisp, "Incarnation," *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 163.

³⁷⁹ Gilles Emery, "The immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the 'Suffering of God'," in eds. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 31-2.

of four-dimensionalism on Christology. With that being said, let us begin to construct a composite Christ.

The Two-Minds View: The Basics

The three part Christology under consideration here is widely known as the two-minds view. Before getting into the details it would be good to get a feel for what an adequate Christology is trying to capture. Typically an adequate Christology is attempting to fall within the bounds of the Council of Chalcedon in 451.³⁸⁰ What does Chalcedonian Christology look like? Oliver Crisp summarizes five relevant desiderata from the Chalcedonian creed.³⁸¹

13) Christ is of one substance (homoousios) with the Father.

14) Christ is eternally begotten of the Father according to his divinity and temporally begotten of the Virgin Mary according to his humanity.

15) Christ is one theanthropic (divine-human) person (hypostasis) subsisting in two natures (*phuseis*), which are held together in a personal union.

16) Christ's two natures remain intact in the personal union, without being confused or mingled together to form some sort of hybrid entity or *tertium quid*.

³⁸⁰ It should be noted that Chalcedon was controversial in its own day. The Monophysite Christians in the East at that time were not happy with “the sickness of Chalcedon” that declared that Christ had two natures. See Sergius the Grammarian in Iain Torrance, *Christology After Chalcedon: Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press Norwich, 1988), 144. Like Chalcedon, many Monophysites held to a three part composite Christology, but unlike Chalcedon they held that after the incarnation the two natures became one nature—without confusion—through the composition. I will focus my critique on Chalcedonian Christology for two reasons. First, while one can acknowledge the importance of Monophysite Christology in the past, and acknowledge that it continues to exist today in the Oriental Orthodox Church, it must be admitted that most Christian theologians in the past and today hold to a Chalcedonian Christology. Because of this more time and effort has been spent developing Chalcedonian ideas, and as such it is a better developed theory. Second, the metaphysical differences between Chalcedonian and orthodox Monophysite Christology seem negligible to me. For instance, both hold to the Nicene Creed, a three part Christology, and the *communicatio idiomatum*. As such, one could take the arguments I develop below and easily tweak them to fit the Monophysite view.

³⁸¹ Crisp, “Incarnation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 161.

17) Christ's two natures are a fully divine nature and a fully human nature, respectively, his human nature consisting of a human body and a 'rational' soul.

This list naturally raises issues related to personal identity, anthropology, and the doctrine of God. What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be divine? What is personal identity? I have already discussed some of the issues related to personal identity through time, and will do so in the next section. For now I will stick with answering the first two questions.

The two-minds view starts by distinguishing between a kind-essence and an individual-essence.³⁸² A kind-essence is a cluster of properties that are essential for being a part of a particular kind of thing. For instance, there is a kind-essence called *bovinity* that signifies the necessary and essential properties a thing must have in order to be considered a cow. An individual-essence is a cluster of properties that are essential to a particular entity. Each human person has an individual-essence, a haecceity or thisness. Socrates has a thisness, and so do we. Our individual-essence is what distinguishes us from everyone else in the human race. It distinguishes one from every other person be they human, angelic, divine, or other. One cannot lose an individual-essential property and continue to exist. One can lose a kind-essential property and continue to exist, but one will cease to exist as that kind of thing. The move for the two-minds view is to posit that an individual-essence can have more than one kind-essence. It can only have one kind-essence essentially, but it can

³⁸² Thomas Morris, "The Metaphysics of God Incarnate," in Rea *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume 1*. Also, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), chapter 9.

contingently have other kind-essences as well.³⁸³ In this instance, God the Son can have a human and divine essence.

Next, the two-minds view tries to distinguish the properties that makeup the kind-essence divinity and the kind-essence humanity. How would one go about doing such a thing? With regard to divinity one could use the method of perfect being theology. Upon doing so she might come up with a list as follows: necessary existence, aseity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipresence, perfect freedom, and eternity. In this instance I shall assume that ‘eternity’ means timelessness.

Part of the desiderata assumes that to be human is to have a human mind and a human body. Yet there seems to be more entailed. How might one go about discerning the necessary properties of humanity? One strategy is to look around at other human persons. A typical list might include the following: contingent existence, created, limited in power, limited in knowledge, limited in goodness, locally and spatially limited, free, and sempiternal. Clearly we have a problem. The two lists conflict with each other in a fundamental way. It would seem that the Son would have contradictory properties in the incarnation.

There are some possible ways around this problem. One can start to assuage the difficulty by pointing out that not all properties that one finds amongst humans are essential. There are common human properties that are not essential human properties. ‘Sinful’ is an example. G.K. Chesterton once said that the doctrine of original sin was the easiest of Christian doctrines to verify. All one needs to do is look out on the street.³⁸⁴ It is not hard to come to the conclusion that all human persons are sinful. Yet, part of the doctrine of the incarnation is that at least one human person,

³⁸³ Marilyn McCord Adams, “Christ as God-Man, Metaphysically Construed,” in Rea, *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume 1*, 241-2.

³⁸⁴ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Simon and Brown, 1908), 11.

Jesus Christ, was not sinful. One of the things we learn from the incarnation is that ‘sinful’ is not an essential property of humanity. It certainly is a common property, but it is not an essential property. One can be human and not sin. In fact, Christian theology proclaims that one day sin will be no more and that human persons will enjoy everlasting life. Christian theology proclaims that humans flourish best when they are not sinful. If ‘sinful’ is an essential property of humanity this is not even possible.

That may be all well and good, but it does not tell us about some of the other incompatible properties. What about necessary existence? Necessary existence is not just an essential property of the divine essence, it is also a part of the Son’s individual-essence. Necessarily, a thing cannot change its modal status. A contingent thing cannot become a necessary thing, nor can a necessary thing become a contingent thing. The Son simply cannot become contingent. Isn’t this a problem? The defender of the two-minds view will say no. The humanity of the Son is contingent, even though the Son Himself is not. As Morris explains, “For God the Son to become human, he thus had to take on a human body, and a human mind, with all that entails. He did not have to become a created contingent being. He just had to take on a created, contingent body and mind of the right sort.”³⁸⁵

The defender of the two-minds view will argue that Christ is fully human since He has all of the essential properties that are entailed by having a human mind and a human body. Yet, Christ is not merely human. We who are merely human are contingent, limited in power, and so on, but Christ is not merely human. Yet, the two-minds view still attempts to make room for limitations of power and knowledge by appealing to the human mind.

³⁸⁵ Morris, “The Metaphysics of God Incarnate,” 217.

God the Son has a divine mind that is omnipotent and omniscient. In assuming a human mind and body He becomes causally connected to this composite such that He constitutes one person with two natures. The divine mind is fully conscious, and so is the human mind. “The human mind drew its visual imagery from what the eyes of Jesus saw, and its concepts from the languages he learned.” The divine mind does not do this since it is already omniscient. The human mind is limited to the resources of its own consciousness and body, but the divine mind is not so limited. There is an asymmetrical accessing relation between the divine mind and the human mind such that the divine mind has access to all of the contents of the human mind, but the human mind does not have access to the contents of the divine mind.³⁸⁶

Is the Two-Minds View Nestorian?

Any adequate Christological model must be able to explain how Jesus Christ is God the Son incarnate in human flesh such that there is one person with a fully divine and a fully human nature. If the two-minds view cannot explain how there is one person in Jesus Christ, it cannot be a part of a Christian research program. If it cannot be a part of a Christian research program, it cannot be employed in a Christian research program that also holds to divine timelessness. Later in this chapter I shall argue that the divine timelessness research program entails Nestorianism. For now, I wish to lay out the initial charge of Nestorianism to illuminate the problems that will face the atemporalist. Also, discussing the charge of Nestorianism will help illustrate another component of an adequate Christological model—the distinction between *enhypostasia* and *anhypostasia*.

³⁸⁶ Morris, “The Metaphysics of God Incarnate,” 220-4.

The charge of Nestorianism can be put in several ways. One way to state the problem is as follows. Typically we think that a person just is a mind with free will. On a two-minds view we have two minds, so we must have two persons.³⁸⁷ Further, on dyothelitism Christ has two wills. Each mind has a will of its own. The situation seems to be this. We have two minds. Each has its own set of beliefs. The first mind can believe p and the second mind can believe $\sim p$. The first mind can intend to will some action a , and the second mind can intend to will $\sim a$.³⁸⁸ The first mind experiences nothing but uninterrupted joy (given divine impassibility). The second mind experiences moments of suffering. The first mind cannot be tempted. The second mind suffers temptations of all sorts. The first mind never experiences change and stands in no temporal relations of any sort (given immutability and timelessness). The second mind does experience change and stands in temporal relations. The first mind cannot be simultaneous with the second mind for *simultaneity* is a temporal relation, and the first mind cannot stand in any temporal relation at all. The first mind is pure act and performs all its actions in one timeless present (given simplicity and timelessness). The second mind has potentiality and its actions are spread out temporally.

³⁸⁷ Tim Bayne, "The Inclusion Model of the Incarnation," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001). Peter Lombard attempts to answer objections of this sort in *The Sentences*, Book 3 Dist. V and X.

³⁸⁸ Historically, it is not clear that there is much consensus on this point. It is a point of contention in contemporary theology as well. For instance, Ivor J. Davidson holds that human will of Jesus "cannot exist in opposition to the will of God." Davidson, "'Not My Will but Yours be Done': The Ontological Dynamics of Incarnational Intention," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 194. Within contemporary philosophy of religion, defenders of the two-minds view typically hold that it must be metaphysically possible for the human nature of Jesus to be able to will differently than the divine mind. One of the motivations that could be developed for this claim is the "without confusion" constraint from the Chalcedonian creed. If it is not possible for Jesus to sin because of His divine nature, there is a confusion of natures. The stated motivation, however, is soteriological. If Jesus cannot possibly sin, then this would seem to undermine the claim that Jesus was tempted in every way. See David Werther, "Freedom, Temptation, and Incarnation," in eds. David Werther and Mark D. Linville, *Philosophy and the Christian Worldview: Analysis, Assessment and Development* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2012). Thomas P. Flint, "'A Death He Freely Accepted': Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001), and "The Possibilities of Incarnation: Some Radical Molinist Suggestions," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001). I fail to see how this is not Nestorianism.

It would seem that we are clearly referring to two different persons, but the doctrine of the incarnation states that there is one person with two natures. As Anselm explains, the Son “assumed another nature, not another person.” (*Incarnation of the Word*, XI) The defender of the two-minds view will claim that normally two minds means two persons, but in the instance of the God-man two minds come together to function as one person.³⁸⁹ This looks suspiciously like the moves of Theodore of Mopsuestia and various Nestorians.³⁹⁰ However, it is also the view espoused in the Tome of Leo leading one to ask if there is really a substantive difference between the orthodox and heretics.³⁹¹

A defender of the two-minds view might try to avoid the charge of Nestorianism in the following way. Oliver Crisp will say that there never was a time when the human nature of Christ exists apart from God the Son. When the Holy Spirit conceived the human nature of Jesus in Mary’s womb, the Son joined Himself to that human nature. So there never was a moment when the human nature existed without

³⁸⁹ Marmodoro and Hill, “Composition Models of the Incarnation,” 483-6. Marmodoro and Hill argue that the human nature does not count as a person since it is subsumed into a larger whole. Another standard defense of this view is to say that <necessarily, no person can have a person as a proper part>. See Leftow, “The Humanity of God,” and Crisp, “Compositional Christology Without Nestorianism.” The Son took on a human body and soul. Normally we think that a human body and a human soul make a person. However, that cannot be the case since the Son is incarnate and He cannot have a person as a proper part. Yet I find this strategy to be lacking. It does not explain how a human soul and body that thinks, feels, and acts is not a person. It just asserts that this isn’t a person in the case of the incarnation. It seems that since <necessarily, no person can have a person as a proper part> and <a person is a mind that thinks, feels, and acts>, compositional Christologies of this sort have a defeater on their hands. In other words, given their account of a human person, it seems *prima facie* impossible for the incarnation to happen as the model understands things. Grant that a human person is a mind—or a body-soul composite—that thinks, feels, and acts. If this is the case, the Son cannot become part of a larger whole with anything that meets this description on pain of having a person as a proper part.

³⁹⁰ Norris, *Christological Controversies*, 113-44.

³⁹¹ This was even a worry for the Illyrian and Palestinian delegates at the Council of Chalcedon who had to be convinced that Pope Leo was not a Nestorian. After the creed was framed, many in the East remained unconvinced. See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam and Charles Black Limited, 1958), 340-2.

being joined to the Son. The “human nature is never in a position to form a supposit distinct from God the Son.”³⁹²

In order to understand what Crisp is up to one must be aware of the *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* distinction within the traditional doctrine of the incarnation. T.F. Torrance explains the distinction as follows. Anhypostasia claims that “Christ’s human nature has its existence only in union with God, in God’s existence or personal mode of being (*hypostasis*). It does *not* possess it in and for itself—hence *an-hypostasis* (‘*not person*’, i.e. no separate person).” Enhypostasia expresses the fact that “the human nature of Christ is given existence in the existence of God, and co-exists *in* the divine essence or mode of being.”³⁹³ One way to understand this is that the Son’s human nature would not have existed if it were not for the incarnation. It did not exist prior to the incarnation. It only exists because of the incarnation. Further, the human nature is only personal because it is assumed by a divine person, God the Son. The human nature is not a person independent of the Son’s assumption.

What must be understood is that the move that Crisp and others make avoids the charge of adoptionism, but not Nestorianism simpliciter. Adoptionism is one Christological heresy that often falls under the category of Nestorianism. On adoptionism, Jesus exists for a certain stretch of time and is later united to God the Son. In this scenario we clearly have two persons. But what must be understood is that adoptionism isn’t the only way to be a Nestorian. All one needs to do in order to be a Nestorian is to offer a Christological model that *entails* two persons in Jesus Christ. One could hold that Jesus “had union with the Logos straightaway from the beginning when he was formed in his mother’s womb,” and still be charged with

³⁹² Crisp, “Compositional Christology without Nestorianism,” in eds. Marmodoro and Hill, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 59. Cf. Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, Book 3, Dist. 2, 3.

³⁹³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation*, 84.

Nestorianism.³⁹⁴ How does affirming the en/anhypostasia distinction remove the charge of Nestorianism simpliciter? It does not.

This distinction, while interesting, does not help in understanding how the two-minds view can explain that the God-man is one person and not two. The en/anhypostasia distinction does not give us a Christological model. Instead, it serves as a constraint for developing Christological models that avoid Nestorianism. Affirming a constraint on adequate Christological models does not explain how Christ can be one person with two natures.³⁹⁵

I cannot see how the two-minds view can avoid Nestorianism. On this model we have two conscious beings—God the Son and the human nature—and it seems impossible for a pair of conscious beings to be one conscious being, but I will set this issue aside for now.³⁹⁶ As noted before, I will pick up the charge of Nestorianism later in the chapter.

What is the Unique Relationship Between the Son and His Humanity?

The charge of Nestorianism is a difficult challenge for the two-minds view, but it is not the only challenge it must face. It must also answer the following two issues. First, the two-minds view must explain what the unique relation is that the Son

³⁹⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia in Norris, *Christological Controversies*, 117.

³⁹⁵ Perhaps there is another way one might try to explain the unity of the person of Christ. Joseph Jedwab, “The Incarnation and Unity of Consciousness” in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* attempts to explicate how two spheres of consciousness and two wills can be unified. His account is cut in terms of divine temporality and as such will be of no use to divine timelessness. Although, he notes that one could do the same on atemporality, but limits his discussion to temporalism. I am skeptical about the success of this on timelessness for a timeless mental state cannot have a unity of consciousness with a temporal mental state. Jedwab defines unity of consciousness as follows: “a subject has unity of consciousness at some time if and only if all the conscious states she has then are co-conscious with each other.” But a timeless mental state cannot stand in any temporal relations with a temporal mental state. A timeless mind cannot have an experience of something at time *t* and so cannot be co-conscious with any mind that has an experience of something at time *t*. For more on this see Richard Swinburne, “The Coherence of the Chalcedonian Definition of the Incarnation,” in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 160.

³⁹⁶ David Barnett, “You are Simple,” in eds., Robert C. Koons and George Bealer, *The Waning of Materialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

has to this human nature that makes the Son a human person. Second, the two-minds view must also explain how the Son is uniquely related to His humanity in a way that is different from how He is related to our humanity. The answers to these issues are closely related, and will help one understand the arguments against divine timelessness discussed below. Also, examining these questions will help to illustrate three more components that make up an adequate Christological model. Those components are said to be *perichoresis*, the *communicatio idiomatum*, and embodiment.

How can the proponent of the two-minds view explain Christ's unique relationship to His humanity? She cannot appeal to the asymmetrical accessing relation between the divine mind and the human mind because the asymmetrical accessing relation is not unique to the incarnation. The Son already has an asymmetrical accessing relation to all human minds, and we do not consider any of us to be the incarnation of God. Further, it seems that the commitment to dyothelitism only serves to bolster this point. The divine mind has a distinct will from the human mind. All human minds have wills that are distinct from God. So what is the difference between me and Jesus?

The doctrine that is supposed to help us understand the unique relation between the Son and His humanity is the doctrine of *perichoresis*. Perichoresis is a tricky doctrine because it is used in a different way of the Trinity than it is of the incarnation. Quite literally perichoresis means interpenetration.³⁹⁷ In Neoplatonic thought, perichoresis was used to describe the relationship between a soul and body.³⁹⁸ In the doctrine of the Trinity the three divine persons stand in a perichoretic relation to one another—they interpenetrate one another such that, necessarily, they

³⁹⁷ John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 260.

³⁹⁸ McGuckin, *Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 260.

cannot exist apart from each other. In the incarnation perichoresis “is the idea that the divine nature of Christ somehow penetrates his human nature, but not conversely, and without compromising the integrity of either of the natures in Christ’s theanthropic person.”³⁹⁹ The idea is that the Son stands in a perichoretic relation to His humanity, and does not stand in a perichoretic relation to the rest of humanity.

Perichoresis is supposed the unique relation that we have been looking for. But does it distinguish the Son’s relation to His humanity from His relation to the rest of humanity? It is not clear that it does. The doctrine of perichoresis within the Trinity can be given a clear modal interpretation—necessarily the divine persons are strongly internally related such that they cannot exist apart from each other.⁴⁰⁰ The doctrine of perichoresis cannot be given this same interpretation within the context of the incarnation because the Son can exist without the human nature. Further, within the Trinity perichoresis gives us three persons with one nature. Within the incarnation, perichoresis is supposed to give us one person with two natures. So what exactly is being affirmed here with perichoresis in the context of the incarnation?

It is hard to say because the doctrine of perichoresis has been used by theologians in the past and today to say all sorts of things about the God-world relation, salvation, and anthropology.⁴⁰¹ None of which is easily distinguishable from how it is used within the doctrine of the incarnation. For instance, a panentheist can say that God stands in a perichoretic relation with creation. On some accounts of panentheism God necessarily exists with creation, so it will be hard to distinguish how perichoresis is being used here from how it is used within the Trinity. Others claim to

³⁹⁹ Crisp, “Incarnation,” 170.

⁴⁰⁰ Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 170.

⁴⁰¹ McCall, *Which Trinity?*, chapter 5. Randall Otto, “The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001).

be eschatological panentheists. On this account God will one day bring creation to its completion. On that day God will be all in all. The eschatological panentheist interprets this to mean that God will eventually stand in a perichoretic relation with all of creation, but in such a way that the integrity of the natures of each is maintained.⁴⁰² Some eschatological panentheists will even say that the perichoretic relation entails that God has divine and creaturely attributes, and that creatures will also have divine and creaturely attributes, yet again, in such a way that the integrity of each nature is maintained.⁴⁰³ This interpretation of perichoresis is indistinguishable from how it is used in the context of the incarnation. Perhaps, then, perichoresis is of little help.

The defender of the two-minds view will most likely argue that these panentheists are using perichoresis in a fast and loose way. She might try tightening up the doctrine by connecting it to the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Because of the perichoretic relation between the Son and His humanity there is a communication of the attributes from the two natures onto the one person. Anselm explains as follows.

And we truly predicate everything, whether regarding God or regarding the human being, of him. For we cannot designate or name the divine Son as person apart from the human son, nor the human son as person apart from the divine Son, since the very same one who is the human son is the divine Son, and the combination of proper characteristics of the Word and the assumed human being is the same. (*Incarnation of the Word XI*)

The idea is that the person who is God the Son is the same person who is Jesus Christ. There is a strict identity relation between the Son and Jesus. They are numerically the same person. The *communicatio idiomatum* tries to capture this whilst maintaining the soteriological significance of the incarnation. The connection between

⁴⁰² John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 115. John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers—From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), chapters 10 and 13. Ted Peters, “Models of God,” *Philosophia* 35 (2007), 285-88.

⁴⁰³ Cooper, *Panentheism*, 256-7.

incarnation and soteriology was one of the driving motivations for rejecting Nestorianism. We need to know that God Himself has come to us. Why? We need to know if it is even possible for human persons to be reconciled to God. The incarnation is an act of reconciliation.⁴⁰⁴ In the one person Jesus Christ, humanity and divinity are perfectly united. Not only is it possible for humanity and divinity to be united, they are in fact united and the incarnation is a demonstration of that fact. If the incarnation is to be meaningful we must know that God Himself has become incarnate. Further, as John of Damascus argues, if God has not taken on the fullness of humanity, we are not saved. That which God has not assumed has not been healed.⁴⁰⁵

This maybe all well and good, but it is still not clear that we have explained how the Son is uniquely related to His humanity such that He (a) counts as a human person, and (b) is differently related to my humanity. Just as with the an/enhypostasia distinction, we do not have a Christological model by appealing to perichoresis and the *communicatio idiomatum*. The reason the an/enhypostasia distinction does not help is because it is a constraint on Christological models. Perichoresis and the *communicatio idiomatum* do not help for different reasons. I take perichoresis to be an unsuccessful attempt at offering a model. It is too coarse-grained of a concept to be useful. The *communicatio*, however, is an entailment from an adequate Christological model. Any adequate Christological model will hold that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures. As such, Jesus will be one suppositum, one ultimate possessor of properties. This is not an explanation for how Christ is human, and how His relation to His humanity is different from my own. Instead, the *communicatio* assumes that there already is an explanation from an adequate Christological model for these issues. We do not have that yet. The answer to these issues does not lie in affirming

⁴⁰⁴ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 65.

⁴⁰⁵ John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, III.6.

constraints on models, nor affirming the entailments of an adequate model. The answer lies in actually offering a model that is compatible with these constraints and has the desired entailments.

What is needed to answer these questions is an account of embodiment.

Above, I noted that the Neoplatonists used perichoresis to describe the relationship between the soul and body. Perhaps, the best way to interpret perichoresis within the doctrine of the incarnation is to understand it as embodiment. To say that the Son is human is to say that He is appropriately related to a human organism or body. The relation that the Son has to His human body will not be the same as the relation I have to my human body. In order to understand this, we need an account of embodiment.

What does it mean to be embodied? There are several accounts of embodiment in the literature, but there appear to be two basic accounts.⁴⁰⁶ The first is physical realization. This assumes a physicalist anthropology of human persons. This view holds that “a person *P* is embodied in body *B* if and only if all the (intrinsic) states of *P* are wholly realized by (intrinsic) states of *B*.”⁴⁰⁷ One way to put this is that all of *P*’s mental states supervene upon the brain states of *B*.⁴⁰⁸ Someone who holds to a materialist Christology will argue for this account of embodiment. However, Leftow notes that such a thing is impossible for the Son—an immaterial thing cannot become wholly material.⁴⁰⁹ My inclination is to agree with Leftow here, but I will not press the point. All that matters for the discussion is that this is not a live option for divine timelessness. It is not a live option since an immaterial person becoming wholly

⁴⁰⁶ Robin Le Poidevin, “The Incarnation: Divine Embodiment and the Divided Mind.” Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 102-4. T.J. Mawson, “God’s Body,” *The Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006).

⁴⁰⁷ Le Poidevin, “The Incarnation: Divine Embodiment and the Divided Mind,” 273.

⁴⁰⁸ For more on supervenience see Jaegwon Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴⁰⁹ Leftow, “The Humanity of God,” 21-2.

physical involves change, and a timeless person cannot change. Perhaps the second account of embodiment will be of use for divine timelessness.

The second broad account is more congenial with immaterial minds and cuts things in terms of a causal connection between the mind and the body. A mind is fully embodied in a physical body iff the following five conditions are met. The first condition is that the disturbances of the physical body cause pain in the mind. Also, the various goings-on in the body cause pleasure in the mind. If the body stubs a toe, the mind will feel pain. If the body is hugged, the body will feel pleasure. Second, the mind can feel the inside of the body. An example would be the feeling of an empty stomach. Third, the mind can move the body through a basic action. A basic action is when an agent can perform an act without having to perform some other action in order to accomplish the first act. For instance, I move my arm by a basic act. I do not move the cup of water on my desk by a basic act. Fourth, the mind looks out from the world from where the body is. The body is the mind's locus of perception of the world. The mind acquires perceptual knowledge as mediated through the body. Fifth, the thoughts and feelings of the mind are affected by the things that go on in the body.⁴¹⁰

With this understanding of embodiment the proponent of the two-minds view can finally answer the questions of this section. If the second divine person is embodied in a particular human organism, He will be a human person. To be a human person is to be a person, a thinking thing with free will, that is embodied in human flesh. The proponent of the two-minds view can further say that God the Son is only embodied in one human organism. The Son does not stand in the same relation to my body as He does to His own. Thus, we have a way of distinguishing the Son's relation

⁴¹⁰ I follow Swinburne's account here. Poidevin makes some minor revisions to this account, and Mawson's account lacks several of the conditions.

to His humanity from His relation to the rest of humanity. Even further, the two-minds theorist can now say that she has a Christological model that entails the *communicatio idiomatum*. The Son being embodied in a particular human organism entails the Son having certain properties from the body. For instance, one can say that the Son walked on water. This cannot be said of God the Son unless the Son is embodied. It is only by having a body that one can predicate this of the Son. This will be discussed further in the next section.

The Reduplicative Strategy and Contradictory Properties

Now that we have a model of the incarnation to work with, we can start to see how it might answer some problems. One problem is that an adequate Christology entails the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, and this doctrine entails that the one person with two natures has contradictory properties. The attributes of divinity and humanity are communicated through the interpenetration of one another onto the one divine person.⁴¹¹ For instance, it is because of the *communicatio idiomatum* that the person of Christ has the contradictory properties *timeless* and *temporal*. How do we resolve the contradiction? In this section I will outline the basic strategy that the compositional Christology of the two-minds view uses to remove contradictory properties. In subsequent sections I will discuss specific ontologies of time and argue that this strategy may help with certain properties, but it does not help with the divine timeless research program.

The Reduplicative strategy, or the qua-move, is the standard way to remove contradictory properties.⁴¹² The idea is that we can coherently talk about the

⁴¹¹ John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith* III.3.

⁴¹² Boethius' *Theological Tractates* is a great example of this move. For a discussion of medieval accounts of reduplication see Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 8. This strategy has a very

properties of Christ's humanity and divinity as parts of the Son. When we talk about the properties of His divinity we do not ascribe to it the human parts. When we talk about the properties of His humanity we do not ascribe to it the divine part. We can, however, ascribe both sets of properties to the one person. For instance, we can say that the Son was crucified. Yet, the divine essence was not crucified.⁴¹³ It is only in virtue of the Son's humanity that He is crucified. One might say, *qua human*, the Son was crucified. How exactly does this work?

In order to get a better feel for the *qua* move we will need to see some examples of how it works. One might say that <the apple is red>. Why is the apple red? It is red because its skin is red. The apple is red *qua skin*, or in virtue of its skin. If one were to peel the apple it would no longer be red. <Socrates is wise>. What makes Socrates wise? Socrates is wise in virtue of having a well trained mind. If Socrates lost his mind, (however you wish to understand that) he would no longer be wise. Imagine you have a ruler and one end is painted green while the other end is painted blue. Your ruler is green and blue in virtue of its painted ends.

Perhaps the idea is that we can say that <Christ is atemporal *qua* divine, but temporal *qua* human>. Have we removed the contradiction? We have only if we refuse to consider the *communicatio idiomatum*. It is not the case that we have two unrelated subjects of predication. We have one person who is said to be atemporal and temporal. Once we bring back in the *communicatio idiomatum* we have <Christ is atemporal simpliciter> and <Christ is temporal simpliciter>. This is because sentences

early history in Christian thought. Tertullian, Athanasius, Apollinaris, and Gregory of Nazianus all make this move. Interestingly, they say that they learned this move from the apostle Peter. 1 Peter 4:1 says, "Christ suffered in the flesh." See Norris, *Christological Controversy* for further discussion, in particular 92.

⁴¹³ John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, III.3-4.

of the form $\langle x \text{ qua } G \text{ is } F \rangle$ entail $\langle x \text{ is } F \rangle$.⁴¹⁴ We could ignore the *communicatio idiomatum* in an effort to save this position, but we would then face Nestorianism, and thus have abandoned an adequate Christology. Maybe we have not used the qua move in the right way since we still have incompatible properties.

As Robin Le Poidevin points out, “One way in which a single thing can exhibit incompatible properties is by having different parts, each of which exhibits one of the incompatible properties. As long as the properties are not exhibited by one and the same part, contradiction is avoided.”⁴¹⁵ Perhaps if we treat Christ’s humanity and divinity as parts we could solve the problem. Douglas Blount points out a possible way to understand this.⁴¹⁶ Consider the following.

18) The Fightin’ Irish *qua* defensive team played well during *t*.

19) The Fightin’ Irish *qua* offensive team did not play well during *t*.

Blount wants to say that the following inferences are not valid.

20) The Fightin’ Irish *simpliciter* played well during *t*.

21) The Fightin’ Irish *simpliciter* did not play well during *t*.

I take it that the inferences to (20) and (21) are not valid since it is only certain parts of the team that played well or poorly.

Of course, two points can be made. First, there is a sense in which these inferences go through. Say Notre Dame won the game. It would seem that a fan could assert (20) without any shame. The team as a whole pulled it off in the end. But say Notre Dame lost the game. A fan would have to shamefully concede that (21) was

⁴¹⁴ Thomas D. Senor, “Incarnation, Timelessness, and Leibniz’s Law Problems,” in eds. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 229.

⁴¹⁵ Robin Le Poidevin, “Incarnation: Metaphysical Issues,” *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009), 707. Also, see his “Identity and the Composite Christ: An Incarnational Dilemma,” *Religious Studies* 45 (2009).

⁴¹⁶ Douglas K. Blount, “On the Incarnation of a Timeless God,” in Ganssle and Woodruff, *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, 239-40.

true. Any denial of (21) would be the sort of post-game bull that one expects to hear on a sports talk show. It is sheer bluster trying to cover up the fact that the team did not bring it together, did not give it their best, and did not play well as a team. We can only deny the inferences to (20) and (21) when we ignore the fact that there is a team out on the field. What this illustrates is that not all cases of the reduplicative strategy can be treated the same.⁴¹⁷ This is because there are certain cases where one property trumps another.⁴¹⁸ For instance, a human person has various non-thinking parts like a nose or an arm. She is not intelligent qua arm. She is intelligent qua mind since the mind is the thing that does the thinking. If Notre Dame loses the game the property *played poorly* trumps its contrary, and if Notre Dame wins the property *played well* trumps.

Second, this seems to be a poor analogy for the incarnation. Surely the mereology of Jesus is nothing like the mereology of a football team. The divine nature and the human nature are not loosely related parts. They stand in a very close relation, a perichoretic relation through embodiment. As Poidevin explains, “The human and divine parts are parts of a single *substance*—that is, an object that persists through time, enjoys a certain independence from other objects, and is a single individual. The properties of the parts can carry over to the whole.”⁴¹⁹ The contradictory properties come back in full force because of the unity of the person of Christ.

Maybe there is a way to successfully maneuver through all of this. It seems some reduplicative strategies work. A two-minds view is committed to substance dualism. Human persons are a composite of an immaterial soul and a material body. On substance dualism a person is an immaterial soul, and has a material body—the

⁴¹⁷ Richard Cross, “Incarnation,” in eds. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 456.

⁴¹⁸ Poidevin, “Identity and the Composite Christ,” 173.

⁴¹⁹ Poidevin, “Identity and the Composite Christ,” 173.

‘is’ being the is of identity. A human person has material properties because she has a body, but this does not entail a contradiction because the dualist is not saying that she is entirely physical. In regards to this set of contradictory properties one can say that God the Son is an immaterial being who possesses a human body. The Son has material properties by having a body. A proponent of the two-minds view is not committed to saying that the Son is entirely physical. All she is committed to is saying that Christ has physical and non-physical parts.

What about necessary and contingent existence? The Son is a necessary being, but His humanity only exists contingently. The person of Christ exists necessarily, but His humanity exists contingently. The two-minds view proponent can argue that persons who are merely human exist contingently, whereas a person who is fully human but not merely human can exist necessarily. Of course, a particular problem arises here. It would seem that the Son is only contingently related to His humanity. If He were necessarily related to His humanity, His humanity would not be contingent. This means that the Son’s human nature is accidental to Him.⁴²⁰ But accidental properties are repugnant to divine simplicity.⁴²¹ The Son, being simple, cannot have accidental properties. The *communicatio idiomatum* entails that the Son has accidental properties so divine simplicity is false.

There might be a way to get around this. Perhaps one could say that only the divine nature is simple, and not the Son. Of course, that would seem to destroy the doctrine of divine simplicity and call into question whether or not the Son is divine. Another possible way to get out of this is to deny the *communicatio idiomatum*, but

⁴²⁰ Blount, “On the Incarnation of a Timeless God,” 243. The traditional “language is intended to emphasize the fact that, while the Son possesses a human nature, such a nature is accidental to him (and, perhaps, that he has it voluntarily).” In *Summa Theologiae* III, Q2 Aquinas denies that the humanity is accidental to Christ. He offers several nuanced distinctions in an attempt to make this work. I find this baffling.

⁴²¹ John Duns Scotus, *De Primo Principio* (Washington D.C.: The Franciscan Institute, 1949), 143.

then one would be left with an inadequate Christology. One might deny that the Son has His humanity accidentally, and insist that the Son has it necessarily. Apart from being *prima facie* implausible, this would seem to lead to immanent subordinationism and not economic subordinationism. Divine simplicity is incompatible with the Incarnation. So much the worse for the divine timeless research program.

One might try to ditch divine simplicity in order to save the timeless research program. As noted in previous chapters, this move would undermine the justification of the timeless research program since one of the reasons often given in support of divine timelessness is divine simplicity. Say one bites the bullet and gives up this source of justification for divine timelessness in an attempt to make the timeless research program compatible with the incarnation. She will still need to answer several questions. Is it possible for the reduplicative strategy to solve the apparent contradiction of the Son being atemporal and temporal? Is it possible for the Son to have a timeless part and a temporal part? Or is this a case where one of the properties trumps the other? That may depend on which theory of time she adopts.

The Reduplicative Strategy, Presentism, and Endurantism

There appears to be a very serious difficulty with presentism and the incarnation even if one does concede that the humanity is a part of Christ. The New Testament witness, the early Church creeds, and the orthodox theologians all affirm (a) that the Son pre-existed His incarnate state, and (b) that the human nature of Christ came into existence at a particular point in time.⁴²² The humanity of Christ simply did not exist until sometime around 4 B.C. At that time it came into existence. The Son could not have been embodied with His humanity prior to that time because there is

⁴²² Holland, *God, Time, and the Incarnation*, chapter 2.

nothing in existence for the Son to be embodied in. God may have timelessly decreed that the Son be embodied with His humanity at 4 B.C., but that does not alter the situation. Embodiment is an extremely intimate relation that the Son stands in with regard to His humanity, and it is impossible for Him to stand in this relation until His humanity comes into existence. This is a real change in the Son since the Son is deeply and intimately related to His humanity. There is no way to remove the temporal implications of this. One might say that <Christ qua divine is atemporal> and <Christ qua human is temporal>, but this does nothing to relieve the fact that at a particular time in history the Son *began* to be embodied in a particular human nature. The human nature is accidental to Him. The human nature is not itself timelessly eternal. It simply did not exist prior to 4 B.C. The divine nature itself undergoes a substantial change in the incarnation by becoming embodied in an enduring human nature.

There are two ways that I can see to avoid this. First, one can give up the doctrine of embodiment. Maybe she will go medieval and say that the Son is not really related to His humanity. If she does this she will have given up any adequate notion of the incarnation. Embodiment is what distinguishes the Son's humanity from everyone else's humanity. If we abandon embodiment there is no legitimate sense in which we can say that the Son assumes humanity, nor any way for us to distinguish the relationship between the Son and His humanity from the Son and our humanity (i.e. how are we not incarnated by the Son as well?). This first option is not a very good move to make. The second possible way to avoid this is to adopt four-dimensional eternalism.

The Reduplicative Strategy, Four-Dimensionalism, and Perdurantism

Instead of treating Christ's human nature as an enduring object that objectively came into existence with the flow of time, one could say that Christ's human nature is a perdurant object. On four-dimensionalism Christ's human nature is eternally located at a particular stretch of time. The human nature will either be a spacetime worm or a series of person stages (temporal counterparts). On this theory of time there is no worry about the human nature not existing and then coming to exist. The temporal parts that make up the humanity of Christ are co-eternal with God. There is never a state of affairs in which God exists alone without the universe. There is never a state of affairs at which God exists without the humanity of Christ.

This may look attractive at first, but an entailment must be brought out. In adopting perdurantism one has given up the numerical identity of God the Son with Jesus Christ. This is because perdurantism is not numerical identity through time. Poidevin explains that "the result is a view of Christ and God the Son as overlapping series of temporal parts."⁴²³ Maybe this is not as bad as it sounds. One will recall that perdurantism is considered by its defenders as identity through time, just not numerical identity through time. An object persists through time by having temporal parts at different times. The temporal parts are supposed to be in the right sort of intimate spatiotemporal and causal relations to each other in order for identity to obtain. Surely an omnipotent being like God could ensure that the humanity of Christ has the appropriate relations necessary for identity through time.

What we have, then, is a model where God the Son is eternally related to a perdurant object. The perdurant object in question is a human nature. Does this save divine timelessness? Poidevin says no since the Son is causally joined with a

⁴²³ Poidevin, "Incarnation: Metaphysical Issues," 713.

collection of temporal parts.⁴²⁴ The Son acts at particular times, so temporality trumps atemporality. Perhaps a dyothelite can get around this. She could assert that the Son eternally decrees that the human nature will certain actions at particular times. The human will acts in time, whereas the divine will acts timelessly. This sounds promising, but we have not yet considered embodiment or the *communicatio idiomatum*. If the Son is embodied in a perdurant humanity He will assume the properties of that humanity. That means that the Son will literally have temporal parts. Such a thing is odious to divine timelessness and divine simplicity since no timeless or simple being can have temporal parts. One could avoid this by saying that it is only the human nature that has temporal parts, but the success of this move depends on denying embodiment and the *communicatio idiomatum*.

Four-Dimensionalism and Subordination

Another problem arises for four-dimensionalism and the incarnation. There is a very real sense in which the Son is eternally incarnate. Typically a Christian theologian will want to say that there is a distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. The immanent Trinity distinguishes the necessary and essential properties of the divine persons as they are in themselves. The economic Trinity distinguishes the contingent properties and roles of the divine persons in the economy of creation and salvation. The immanent Trinity is about God in Himself, and the economic Trinity is about God in relation to creation. In the economy of salvation the Son is subordinate to the Father by being obedient in the incarnation. This is said to be a non-essential role that the Son freely takes in the economy of salvation. (Of course, divine simplicity makes this impossible since God cannot have any accidental

⁴²⁴ Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," 183.

properties.) In what sense can we maintain the immanent and economic distinction on four-dimensionalism? The Son is eternally incarnate, and thus would seem to be eternally subordinate. If the Son is eternally subordinate it is hard to see how He is equal to the Father.

The defender of divine timelessness cannot say that the Son is only subordinate to the Father from 4 B.C. on. That would make the Son temporal, and on four-dimensionalism that would entail that the Son has temporal parts. As such, one has abandoned timelessness, simplicity, and immutability.

A possible move is to distinguish between absolute necessity and conditional necessity. Absolute necessity applies to the essence of a thing, whereas conditional necessity applies to a particular supposition.⁴²⁵ A triangle has three sides of absolute necessity. The proposition <Socrates is sitting> is conditionally necessary. If it is true, it is impossible for <Socrates is not sitting> to be true. With this modal distinction in hand one might say that the Son is subordinate of conditional necessity. It could have been the case that God did not create a world at all. It could have been the case that the Father or the Holy Spirit had become incarnate instead of the Son.⁴²⁶ However, God has eternally decreed the subordination of the Son. There never was a time when the Son was not subordinate to the Father. We may have a modal collapse on our hands since it appears that things could not have in fact been otherwise given divine timelessness, immutability, and simplicity.

Modal collapse can be avoided if it were actually possible for God to have willed differently. Of course, this will be of little help. If God could have done otherwise, He would have been different in several respects. First, His will would

⁴²⁵ Michael J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*, 2nd Edition (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008). 172.

⁴²⁶ Anselm, *Incarnation of the Word*, X.

have been different. Instead of actualizing world A where the Son becomes incarnate, God would have actualized world B where the Holy Spirit becomes incarnate.

Second, the contents of God's beliefs would have been different. Instead of believing <the Son is incarnate> God would have the belief <the Holy Spirit is incarnate>. The reason this is of little help is that it undermines divine simplicity. A simple God cannot have any potential. He is pure act. If God could have done otherwise, these possibilities represent potential acts that God could perform but did not. As such, God has unactualized potential, so He isn't pure act and thus not simple. Further, it undermines immutability. His act of creation does affect His essence in a meaningful way. God is the creator of world A, and not the creator of world B. If it is actually possible for God to create a different world, then God is not immutable in the sense necessary to preserve divine timelessness. The type of immutability needed is one where it is impossible for God to undergo any change or be different in any respect.

Modal collapse can be avoided by getting rid of divine simplicity and immutability, but those doctrines are reasons for holding to atemporality. If those doctrines go, we have no reason to think that God is timeless. Further, these doctrines play an integral role in the atemporalists' research program. Abandoning these doctrines destroys the integrity of her research program.

Can a Timeless God be Embodied?

This is an important question for part of the meaning of incarnation is that the Son became embodied in human flesh. If a timeless God cannot become embodied, the incarnation is impossible. In this section I will argue that a timeless God cannot become incarnate.

Can a timeless person be embodied on the account discussed above? It seems the answer is no for a timeless mind can, at best, only satisfy one of the four conditions for embodiment. Le Poidevin points out that the “conclusion must be that on the composite model, only Christ’s human mind is embodied, not the divine mind.”⁴²⁷ I will take each condition in turn.

The first condition holds that the disturbances and goings-on of the physical body will cause pain or pleasure in the mind. The human mind of the Son can meet this condition, but the divine mind cannot. The human mind felt pleasure as the body was warmed by the sun. The human mind felt pain as the body was nailed to the cross. The divine mind felt none of this for several reasons. First, these are temporal—successive—experiences and a timeless mind cannot have such experiences. Second, a timeless mind is also impassible. It does not receive joy from anything *ad extra*, nor can its’ joy be interrupted. The classical tradition has long held that the divine nature did not suffer on the cross, but that only the human nature did. It would appear that, on a two-minds view, the divine mind does not meet this first condition.

The second condition holds that the mind can feel the inside of the body. The human mind of Jesus experienced the feeling of an empty stomach during the temptation in the desert. I gather that the resurrected body of Jesus also experienced hunger. In Luke 24:36-43 Jesus appears to the disciples. Naturally they are startled and suspect He may be a ghost. Jesus offers several signs that He is not a ghost. He points out that He has a body that can be touched. Then He asks if there is anything to eat. I would assume that the broiled fish He was given gave Him the feeling of a full stomach. It seems that the human mind of Jesus can experience the body’s full

⁴²⁷ Le Poidevin, “The Incarnation: Divine Embodiment and the Divided Mind,” 278.

stomach, but that the divine mind cannot. First, these bodily sensations are successive, and a timeless mind cannot experience succession. Second, an embodied mind would acquire knowledge through the body about this feeling, and a timeless mind cannot acquire knowledge. Third, a timeless mind is also impassible, and an impassible mind cannot suffer the pangs of an empty stomach.

The third condition is that a mind can move a body through a basic action. This seems to be the only condition that a timeless mind could satisfy, but it satisfies this condition in a rather unsatisfactory way. The doctrines of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence entail that God can move any material object through a basic action. There is nothing that distinguishes God's ability to perform basic actions on the entire universe from His ability to perform basic actions on a particular body. (Since I have already argued that there is no account of atemporal action with temporal affects, I will not rehash that here. For the sake of argument I will assume that there is some working model of this.) There is another problem as well. On the two-minds view under consideration the God-man has two wills. The human mind wills that the body perform some action *a* through a basic action. The divine mind also (timelessly) wills that the body perform some action *a* through a basic action. We have overdetermination. One of the wills is completely unnecessary and superfluous. How can this overdetermination be avoided? One could posit that the human mind actively wills *a* whereas the divine mind passively or permissively wills *a*. This would be a similar move to that which is made in various accounts of divine providence.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ What I have in mind are reformed accounts of divine providence, but the same applies to medieval accounts as well. Thomas Aquinas seems to cut the operations of the two wills of Christ in terms of primary and secondary causation just like he does in his account of divine providence. He explicitly compares the relation between the divine and human wills in Christ to that of the divine will and the saints. "Whatever was in the human nature of Christ was moved at the bidding of the Divine will; yet it does not follow that in Christ there was no movement of the will proper to human nature, for the good wills of other saints are moved by God's will, 'Who worketh' in them 'both to will and to accomplish,' as is written Phil. 2:13." A little later he says, "the human will of Christ had a determinate

This move, however, is open to the charge of Nestorianism. In short, it is not clear how one can avoid having to bite the bullet on overdetermination. Regardless of this, if a defender of atemporality can solve these problems she has only succeeded in satisfying one of the conditions for embodiment.

Yet not all models of the incarnation can even come this close to satisfying this condition. Some explicitly deny that the divine mind interacts directly with the body. As such, the divine mind does not move the body by a basic act. Instead, the divine mind works through the human mind in order to interact with the body. Thinkers like Origen, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, and Peter Lombard claim that the human mind acts as a mediator between the Son and the body. The idea is that the human soul serves as a wall to protect the Son from the “grossness” of human flesh.⁴²⁹ It also somehow prevents the Son from suffering any change. This was a widespread model in the ancient and medieval Church. If one adopts this model she cannot satisfy the third condition for embodiment.

Condition four holds that a mind’s locus of perception on the world is from the perspective of the body. The mind acquires perceptual knowledge from the body. As noted above, on a two-minds view the divine mind does not acquire knowledge through the body. Only the human mind does.⁴³⁰ The divine mind as timeless and omniscient cannot acquire any knowledge. Further, a timeless mind cannot look out from the perspective of a body for that would require having succession. An

mode from the fact of being in a Divine hypostasis, i.e. it was always moved in accordance with the bidding of the Divine will.” ST III, Q18.

⁴²⁹ Marmodoro and Hill, “Compositional Models of the Incarnation,” 475-79. Origen in Norris, *Christological Controversy*, 76. Gregory of Nazianzus in ed. Henry Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Cyril of Jerusalem to St. Leo the Great* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 108. Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 3, Dist. II, XXI, and XXII.

⁴³⁰ Morris, “The Metaphysics of God Incarnate,” 220-4.

embodied mind perceives one thing, then another, then another, and so on. A timeless mind cannot have any succession.

The final condition holds that the thoughts and feelings of the mind are affected by the body. The human mind of Jesus can easily satisfy this condition for reasons noted above, but the divine mind cannot satisfy this condition. The divine mind is timeless, immutable, and impassible. It cannot be affected by anything *ad extra* nor change in any way. If the human body suffers, the divine mind will remain in a timeless state of uninterrupted joy. As the human body grows weak and tired, the human mind feels it and thinks “I should get some sleep.” The divine mind has no knowledge of what it is like to feel tired, nor can the divine mind entertain the belief “I should get some sleep” in any meaningful way. This is because a timeless, immutable, and impassible mind cannot possibly experience the sensation of growing tired and weak.

As it stands divine timelessness can at best meet one of the conditions for embodiment. Since all five conditions must be met for embodiment to take place one may reasonably conclude that the divine mind is not embodied. Sure the human mind is embodied, but so what? God the Son is a divine mind. If a timeless divine mind cannot become embodied, and God the Son is a divine mind, God the Son cannot become embodied. It looks like we do not have an incarnation on our hands, and that is repugnant to Christian belief. At worst we have a divine mind that is generically related to all physical objects in virtue of being omnipresent (and I have already laid out the problems this causes for divine timelessness). At best we have a divine mind that is loosely related to a human mind and a human body. But the relation is far too loose to be considered an adequately orthodox account of the incarnation. If a timeless

divine mind cannot be incarnate, Christians must give up belief in timeless divine minds.

Two-minds and Knowledge De Se

God's knowledge is so peculiarly his own, as to be impossible to be communicated to any thing created, not even to the soul of Christ; though we gladly confess, that Christ knows all those things which are required for the discharge of his office and for his perfect blessedness.

—James Arminius⁴³¹

Some may find my last point about embodiment contentious. Perhaps one might object that the relation thus described is not too loose to be considered an adequately orthodox account of the incarnation. What makes it 'too' loose? The fact that the divine mind is not embodied. No embodiment, no incarnation. Further, the fact that the divine mind bears the same basic generic relation to the human mind and body of Jesus that He does to all other human minds and bodies makes the relation far too loose to count as an incarnation.⁴³² But the point can be pressed even further when we consider *de se* beliefs. Knowledge *de dicto* is knowledge about propositions. Knowledge *de re* is knowledge by acquaintance. Knowledge *de se* is personal knowledge, or knowledge from a first-person perspective. Allow me to illustrate.

Say there is a bachelor named Bill. Bill has heard on more than one occasion that <sex is enjoyable>. After receiving an overwhelming amount of testimonial evidence to this effect he develops the *de dicto* belief that <sex is enjoyable>.

⁴³¹ Disputation IV.XLVI from "25 Public Disputations" in ed. James Nichols and William Nichols, *The Works of James Arminius: The London Edition Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986). Peter Lombard would disagree with Arminius. For him, the human soul of Christ knows all that God knows. However, the human soul does not comprehend all things as clearly and perfectly as God does. See *The Sentences* Book 3 Dist. XIII and XIV. Francis Turretin points out that this is a theological difference between Catholic scholastics and Protestants. Catholics and Protestants agree, he says, that the human soul of Christ knows all things after the ascension. They disagree over the human soul's knowledge during Christ's earthly sojourn. See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Volume 2 (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1994), 348-50.

⁴³² John Hick offers a similar argument against the two-minds view. "The Logic of God Incarnate," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989).

However, he has not yet experienced it himself first-hand. At this point Bill's belief is merely propositional. Now say that Bill finds a wonderful girl and he marries her. After Bill's wedding night he acquires a new type of knowledge: knowledge *de re*. He can now entertain the *de re* belief that <sex is enjoyable>. He has a first-hand knowledge of sex that he did not previously have. He can also entertain a *de se* belief, or a first-person belief that no one else can entertain: <I enjoy sex>. Other people can entertain a similar belief, but it will not be the exact same *de se* belief as Bill's since this *de se* belief is about Bill. One cannot entertain this *de se* belief unless he is in fact Bill. Other people can entertain the *de se* belief <I enjoy sex>, but it will be a unique *de se* belief about them and no one else. The "I" will pick out someone different, and thus be a different proposition.

What does this have to do with the incarnation? In the incarnation there is supposed to be one person with two natures. There is supposed to be one "I" and not two, one subject of predication and not two, etc. Given the nature of *de se* beliefs—that they pertain to unique individual persons—it seems that a timeless God cannot be incarnate since a timeless God cannot entertain the same *de se* beliefs as Jesus.

Consider the following.

22) If God the Son cannot entertain the same *de se* beliefs as Jesus, God the Son is not the same person as Jesus.

23) If God the Son is timeless, immutable, and impassible, He cannot entertain the same *de se* beliefs as Jesus.

24) Thus, God the Son is not the same person as Jesus.

(22) follows from the nature of *de se* beliefs. They are beliefs that can only be entertained by a unique person. Two different persons cannot share the same *de se* belief. They may have a belief that takes the same form like <I enjoy sex> but the

propositional content is different for each person. The “I” in the proposition picks out a different person.

(23) is the contentious premise and will need some defense. Say that Jesus has the following *de se* beliefs.

(25) I am suffering on the cross.

(26) I began to feel hungry at 11:00am on 3 March, 28.

(27) I began to feel full at 12:00pm on 3 March, 28.

(28) I am ignorant of the second coming.

Can God the Son entertain (25)-(28)? No. As impassible the Son cannot entertain the belief <I am suffering>. As timeless and immutable the Son cannot begin to feel hungry or full. As omniscient the Son cannot be ignorant. Jesus has these *de se* beliefs, but the Son does not.

Maybe the proponent of divine timelessness can try to find beliefs that the Son has that would make it the case that He counts as the same person as Jesus. What kind of beliefs could the Son entertain? Perhaps one will say that the Son has the tenseless belief that <my human nature is hungry at 11:00am on 3 March, 28>. Surely this is not good enough. This simply is not the same *de se* belief that the human mind of Jesus holds. It should be noted that the atemporalist cannot say that the Son holds the tenseless belief <I begin to feel hungry at 11:00am on 3 March, 28> for that would entail the Son beginning to have an experience and a belief at a time. Nor can the atemporalist say that the Son holds the tenseless belief <I begin to feel hungry at 11:00am on 3 March, 28 *qua* humanity> for that would fall subject to the problems noted above for reduplication: it would entail (26).

The *de se* beliefs of the human mind of Jesus captured in (25)-(28) are temporal beliefs that involve change, succession, variation of emotion, ignorance of

the future, and an interruption of pure joy. These simply are not *de se* beliefs that any timeless, immutable, or impassible divine mind could entertain. (23) is true, and (24) follows. If the Son is not the same person as Jesus, we have a clear cut case of Nestorianism.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have argued that divine timelessness is not compatible with the incarnation. One must pick either divine timelessness or the incarnation. Christians cannot give up the incarnation. It is essential to Christian belief and is at the heart of the gospel. Atemporality is not at the heart of the gospel, nor is it essential to Christian belief. Divine timelessness is not even taught in the Bible, and as such Christians should feel no worries about giving up divine timelessness in order to be faithful to the explicit teachings of scripture.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that the Christian God cannot be timeless. Given the existent theories of time, and the models of God's relation to time, the prospects for a Christian research program that includes divine timelessness seem bleak.

At this point, however, there may be some remaining questions from the reader. Perhaps the reader might like to know why I did not discuss certain issues. For instance, one might ask about my commitment to presentism, or my take on the biblical material. Clearly, given the limitations of space and the focus of this research, certain questions must be left aside for future work. I have done my best to discuss all of the essential issues, but there are other remaining issues that I would like to have gone into. In this conclusion I wish to note briefly some of these issues, and how they might impact the debate concerning God's relation to time.

Science and Time

First, it might seem quite obvious that I did not delve deeply into scientific issues as they relate to time. For example, one might ask how I can square my presentism with contemporary physics. It should be noted that many others have done this better than I can, and as such I am quite happy to leave it in their capable hands.⁴³³ There are fascinating debates in the current literature between presentists and eternalists over the implications of relativity theory and quantum mechanics. Ultimately, this debate is not relevant for the argument of my work. As I have argued,

⁴³³ Dean Zimmerman, "Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold," in ed. Craig Callender, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). William Lane Craig, *God, Time and Eternity* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001) chapters 6-7. Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 11. C.J. Isham and John Polkinghorne, "The Debate Over the Block Universe," in eds. Robert John Russell, Nancy Murphy, C.J. Isham *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* 2nd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). Craig Bourne, *A Future for Presentism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapters 5-7.

even if four-dimensional eternalism is the correct theory of time, God cannot be regarded as timeless. However, my current and future publications develop an account of God's temporality from a presentist ontology of time, and not from an eternalist ontology. Further, my account of divine temporality holds that time never began to exist. As such, a few brief comments seem appropriate at this point, but it must be stressed that these comments are brief. A thorough discussion would delve into the structure of scientific theories, the ways that theories are open to metaphysical interpretation, and what one thinks mature scientific theories are accomplishing.⁴³⁴ This task clearly goes beyond the bounds of this current project.

So what can be said briefly? Two things. First, there is no clear difficulty from physics for presentism. Second, science does not clearly teach that time began with the universe. I will look at physics and presentism first before discussing the beginning of time.

First, it should be noted that with the Special Theory of Relativity (STR), there is nothing within the theory itself to give us a preferred reference frame. In other words, there is nothing within the theory itself that picks out the present moment of time.⁴³⁵ A four-dimensional eternalist can argue that STR refutes presentism and confirms her theory of time. Christopher J. Isham and John Polkinghorne explain this understanding of STR as follows.

In the common parlance, within the theory of relativity there is no unequivocal meaning to the simultaneity of events, and thus no unequivocal concept of "time." Consequently, no meaning can be ascribed to the notion of *the* future or past... The most that can be affirmed in special relativity is the existence of

⁴³⁴ Katherine Hawley, "Science as a Guide to Metaphysics?" *Synthese* 149 (2006). Tim Maudlin, "Distilling Metaphysics From Quantum Physics," in ed. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford, 2003). Jeffrey Koperski, "Metatheoretic Shaping Principles: Where Science Meets Theology," in ed. William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Dean Zimmerman, *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011).

⁴³⁵ Smart, "The Tenseless Theory of Time," in ed. Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 232.

an infinite family of possible definitions of time that are related to inertial reference frames.⁴³⁶

Since there are an infinite number of inertial frames a four-dimensionalist will contend that there is no justification for the presentist to pick one inertial frame as privileged over any other to be the cosmic present.⁴³⁷

This might seem like an interesting fact of STR that should inform our philosophy of time. However, should we give up our deep seated beliefs about the present just because nothing within STR can pick out the present? Polkinghorne cautions us against doing so. “[A]s for the present moment, so much the worse for physics if it finds no representation of such a basic human experience—only the most crassly physical reductionist could try to turn this deficiency of science into a source of metaphysical insight.”⁴³⁸

Why think Polkinghorne is right about this? To begin, it should be noted that STR, and physics in general, does not give us all there is to know about the world. For instance, fundamental physics does not account for causation, and that is not a good reason for giving up our belief that causation is a fundamental feature of reality.⁴³⁹ Just because STR fails to account for certain features of reality, does not mean that we should give up our belief in those features of reality.

Ultimately, the presentist should not give up her position in light of STR because STR is, strictly speaking, false. This is why physicists continue to work on

⁴³⁶Isham and Polkinghorne, “The Debate Over the Block Universe,” in eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, C.J. Isham *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* 2nd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 141.

⁴³⁷Robert John Russell, “Time in Eternity: Special Relativity and Eschatology,” in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39, no. 1(2000): 50. He says, “[t]here is no physically significant way of determining a universally agreed upon present according to [STR].”

⁴³⁸Polkinghorne, “Space, Time, and Causality,” *Zygon* 41 (2006), 977.

⁴³⁹Bradley Monton, *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design* (Canada: Broadview Press, 2009), 91-2. Also, Paul Humphreys, “Causation,” in ed. W.H. Newton-Smith, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Science* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 36-39.

the General Theory of Relativity (GTR) and Quantum Theory (QT). Bradley Monton explains as follows.

[STR] is a *false* theory, and prima facie it's not a good idea to derive metaphysical lessons for our world on the basis of a theory that doesn't correctly describe our world. The reason special relativity is false is that it makes predictions at variance with reality. For example, according to special relativity, a clock at the base of a building will run at the same rate as a clock at the top of the building (assuming that the building is in an inertial frame of reference), but in fact the clock at the base runs slower. This fact about clocks is one piece of evidence for general relativity—according to general relativity, a clock in a stronger gravitational field runs more slowly than a clock in a weaker gravitational field.⁴⁴⁰

GTR tries to account for things that STR does not. However, the four-dimensional eternalist could try to say that GTR is incompatible with presentism since GTR does not give us a preferred way to pick out the present either. But this is not entirely obvious since there are some models of GTR that do allow us to develop a way of picking out the present. What must be understood is that fundamental physics does not give us the whole story of reality. As noted earlier, just because one scientific discipline fails to account for a particular facet of reality does not entail that other disciplines fail to do so as well. When one investigates reality she will want to draw upon as many disciplines as possible because each discipline focuses on a particular facet of reality. In order to figure out which model of GTR best describes the universe that we actually live in, one will need to draw upon knowledge gained from other disciplines. As Polkinghorne explains, “when one moves from physics to cosmology and considers the Universe as a whole, there is indeed a natural meaning of cosmic time (and so a cosmic ‘now’), which is defined by the frame of reference at

⁴⁴⁰ Monton, “Prolegomena to Any Future Physics-Based Metaphysics,” in ed. Jonathan Kvanvig, *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 145.

rest with respect to the cosmic background radiation.”⁴⁴¹ These considerations from cosmology are how we come up with the calculation that the universe is about 13 billion years old. When one considers scientific disciplines other than fundamental physics the privileged present comes back with vengeance. So GTR does not appear to be a problem for the presentist either.

However, it should be pointed out that GTR, as it is currently stated, is most likely false since it conflicts with QT. As noted above, GTR says that clocks run faster or slower depending upon the influence of the gravitational field they are in. QT says that ideal clocks run the same rate regardless of the gravitational field. Does QT conflict with presentism? Again, the answer is that it does not obviously do so. It is the case that many physicists maintain that the relativity of simultaneity is a lesson learned from STR, and they hope that this will carry over into QT, but it is also the case that there are interpretations of QT that do have a privileged present.⁴⁴² What must be made clear is that we have no idea what time will ultimately look like in later, more refined versions of QT.⁴⁴³ It is quite possible for a version of QT that is compatible with presentism to turn out to be true, but we simply do not know at this time which version, if any, will turn out to be the true description of reality.

What about the beginning of time? Does contemporary science not teach us that time began with the Big Bang? As noted in chapter 2, this is far from obvious. Contemporary physicists appear to be working with something like a relational theory of time, but it is not quite as fundamental as the relational theory. The physicist concerns herself with measurable physical changes, and as such is methodologically

⁴⁴¹ John Polkinghorne, “The Nature of Time,” in ed. Alain Comtes, Michael Heller, Shahn Majid, Roger Penrose, John Polkinghorne, and Andrew Taylor *On Space and Time* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2008), 280.

⁴⁴² Bradley Monton, “Presentism and Quantum Gravity,” in ed. Dennis Dieks, *The Ontology of Spacetime* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006).

⁴⁴³ Zimmerman, “Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold,” 178.

unconcerned with the possibility of non-physical changes. Further, she will be methodologically unconcerned with whether or not the absolute theory of time is true.⁴⁴⁴ For the physicist, if there is no way to develop a clock, then there is no time even if events can still be in a chronological order of before and after.⁴⁴⁵ This is why one will see physicists say things like “time began at the Big Bang,” but then see physicists ask the question, “What came before the Big Bang?” The same physicists who say that time began at the Big Bang will also posit a universe or a multiverse generator that exists prior to our universe to explain what caused the Big Bang. This is an unfortunate way of talking. It would be better for physicists to say that measured time as we know it began shortly after the Big Bang (to account for the Planck era), instead of saying that time *simpliciter* began at the Big Bang. Quite clearly they are talking about time before the Big Bang when they posit prior universes with their own measured time series.

The Bible on Time and Eternity

One might complain that I did not delve too deeply into the biblical literature. I had developed a full chapter that offered a detailed discussion of the biblical material on God, time, and eternity, as well as a companion chapter that developed the method of perfect being theology and how to use it to interpret scripture and use scripture to interpret perfect being theology. But space limitations did not allow me to include these chapters. Basically, what I would suggest is that there is no hint of divine timelessness in the Christian scriptures. One can easily find the claim that God exists without beginning and without end in the Bible, but one cannot find anything

⁴⁴⁴ Thanks to the Physics and Philosophy Society at the University of St Andrews for much discussion and clarity on this issue.

⁴⁴⁵ George Musser, “Could Time End?” *Scientific American* 21 (2012). Roger Penrose, *Cycles of Time: An Extraordinary New View of the Universe* (London: Vintage Books, 2010).

that resembles a “without succession” clause anywhere in scripture. More importantly, the Bible describes eternity in temporal terms. As G.E. Ladd puts it, “Biblically, eternity is unending time.”⁴⁴⁶ As Ted Peters explains,

The biblical words that come into English as *eternity* refer to an age that lasts a long time, perhaps forever. Isaiah uses the Hebrew word *olam* when writing, ‘I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age’ (Isaiah 60:15 NRSV). In the New Testament the principal term for eternity is *aion*, which comes into English also as *aeon*, meaning literally an age that lasts for a long time. This is the term used in John 3:16: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (*zōen aionion*).’⁴⁴⁷

Whenever the Bible talks about eternity it uses temporal terms. Despite this fact, most of classical Christian theology ignores this. Most thinkers throughout Church history in the East and the West simply assume divine timelessness and offer proof-texts like Exodus 3:14, Numbers 23:19, Malachi 3:6, Psalm 90, Psalm 139, Isaiah 46, James 1:17, 2 Peter 3, Hebrews 13:8, and Revelation 1:4. None of these passages, however, give us the without succession clause. In fact, many of them directly, or indirectly, suggest that God does have succession in His life. Further, the passages noted here that say that ‘God does not change’ have a limited scope of the ways in which God does not change. They do not teach that God does not change in any way, shape, or form. Instead, they speak of God not changing with regard to keeping His promises, or never ceasing to be good and loving. Elsewhere I have delved into these issues a bit more, but space limitations do not permit me to discuss this fully here.⁴⁴⁸

If one were to hazard a guess as to why so many theologians overlooked the fact that the Bible speaks of eternity in temporal terms, one should recall the

⁴⁴⁶ G.E. Ladd, ‘Age, Ages’, in ed. Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 21.

⁴⁴⁷ Peters, ‘Eschatology: Eternal Now or Cosmic Future?’ *Zygon* 36 (2001), 352.

⁴⁴⁸ See my “Divine Temporality and the Charge of Arianism” (Forthcoming), and “Divine Perfection and Creation,” *The Heythrop Journal* (Forthcoming).

discussion of chapter 3. There I discussed how classical theologians and philosophers were in the practice of providing non-temporal readings of temporal terms when speaking about God. Theologians admitted the weakness of using terms like ‘present’ to speak of God, but they felt that they had given a sufficiently non-temporal meaning to such terms in these particular contexts. One example comes from the Dionysian mystical tradition in the East. Theologians in this tradition struggled with the fact that the Bible uses temporal terms to describe eternity. They note that sometimes the Bible uses terms that are not worthy of God, and that these things can be interpreted to say something that is truly worthy of God.⁴⁴⁹ The idea seems to be that even though the Bible describes eternity in temporal terms, we should not let this deter us from believing that God is timeless and that He existed before, and without, creation. In other words, one can give these temporal statements in the Bible a non-temporal interpretation. This is better than the kind of proof-texting that has characterized classical Christian theology, but it still does not help to ground divine timelessness biblically because there is nothing within scripture to suggest that we should give these passages a non-temporal reading.⁴⁵⁰

By way of example, consider the common proof text for divine timelessness, Revelation 1:4, which speaks of God as the one “who is and who was and who is to come.” This phrase, and variations of it, is repeated throughout the book of Revelation. It might strike one as an odd proof-text for divine timelessness since it clearly speaks of God having a past and a future. The same God who came to us in the past is the same God who is with us now, and is the same God who will come again. This phrase does imply God’s eternity, but it also implies succession in the life of

⁴⁴⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 10.3.2. C.f. *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, translated by Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 233-8.

⁴⁵⁰ Henri Blocher, “Yesterday, Today, Forever: Time, Times, Eternity in Biblical Perspective.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 52 (2001).

God. An atemporalist, like the 17th Century theologian Francis Turretin, will quickly point out that this passage speaks anthropopathically, so in actuality it does not imply succession in God.⁴⁵¹ Why think a thing like that? Since the time of Plato, philosophers have thought it proper to speak of the timeless God in the present tense only. As noted in chapter 3, the present tense ‘is’ is given a non-temporal reading when applied to the timeless God. As such, it is not strictly speaking proper to refer to God with the past tense ‘was’ and the future tense ‘will be.’

Should we take Revelation to be speaking anthropopathically here? Surely not!⁴⁵² One of the striking features of Revelation is that it continually speaks of God as being the one who “was, is, and is to come.” Despite the fact that the timeless ‘is’ was widespread by the time Revelation was written, the author does not take up this way of speaking about God. The conceptual machinery needed to speak about God as timeless was available to the author of Revelation, and yet the author does not use it. As David E. Aune points out, the predicate ‘the One who is’ was often used in Greco-Jewish texts to denote a non-temporal existent God. The author of Revelation, instead, modifies the common language and speaks of ‘the One who is to come.’ The formula of the One who is, was, and is to come is unique to Revelation, and does not occur elsewhere in Jewish and Christian texts before the 3rd Century.⁴⁵³

The author of Revelation seems to have a particular purpose in speaking of God as the one who “was, is, and is to come.” It is not an unreasonable interpretation to say that the author wishes to emphasize that this God has a past. Even further, this

⁴⁵¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Volume 1* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992), 203.

⁴⁵² If we say ‘yes,’ we cannot use this passage a proof-text for atemporality. Why? Because it does not explicitly teach that God exists without succession. One must presuppose that God exists without succession in order to argue that this passage must be taken in an anthropomorphic or poetic way. A proof-text is of little use if one must explain away what it actually says.

⁴⁵³ Aune, “God and Time in the Apocalypse of John,” in eds. A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera, *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 230-2.

God has made promises about the future. Given what we know about God from what He has done in the past, and is currently doing in the present, we can be confident that He will keep His promises. In short, the portrayal of God advanced by the author of Revelation is deeply temporal. As such, it cannot be a proof-text for divine timelessness.

It should be noted that not all proponents of divine timelessness think that the Bible clearly teaches the doctrine. Paul Helm, for one, thinks that the doctrine is underdetermined by the biblical evidence.⁴⁵⁴ Others are even less confident than this about the biblical teaching. The 17th Century theologian Stephen Charnocke notes that the Bible does not teach that God exists without succession. However he does offer a reason as to why the Bible does not teach this—because of the weakness of our concepts the Holy Spirit describes eternity in the Bible simply as without beginning and without end.⁴⁵⁵ The 20th Century theologian Louis Berkhof makes a similar move. He notes that Scripture teaches that God’s eternity is duration throughout endless ages, but comments that this is merely a popular way of speaking. Scripture, he says, does not give us the strict philosophical sense of eternity (i.e. without succession), though he suggests that 2 Peter 3:8 might allude to it.⁴⁵⁶

This is an unfortunate suggestion from Berkhof because 2 Peter 3:8 makes no such allusion. 2 Peter 3:8 alludes to Psalm 90, and as discussed in chapter 2, Psalm 90 teaches that God exists from perpetual duration in the indefinite past to perpetual duration in the indefinite future. It is hard to get a more temporal description of God

⁴⁵⁴ Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time, Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

⁴⁵⁵ Charnocke, *Several Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Newman, 1682), 181 and 186. John Tillotson, a contemporary of Charnocke’s, disagrees. For him timelessness is inconsistent with a God who is coexistent with succession. We should instead stick with the plain meaning of the text when it says that God exists without beginning and without end. We need to believe what the Bible says, and not the “unintelligible notions of the schoolmen.” Tillotson, *The Remaining Discourses on the Attributes of God* (London: Rofe and Crown, 1700), 359-68.

⁴⁵⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 60.

than this. But this is not the only reason that Berkhof's suggestion is unfortunate. It is unfortunate because reading 2 Peter in terms of divine timelessness completely obscures the message of the passage. It is at this point that I wish to mention the unfortunate pastoral consequences of the divine timeless research program. In chapters 3 and 5, and elsewhere, I showed that the divine timeless research program explicitly entails that God is not the Creator, Redeemer, and Lord because of divine simplicity.⁴⁵⁷ To say that this undermines the basic claims of the Bible would be an understatement. But the destructive effects of the timeless research program to the gospel do not stop there. Divine timelessness prevents us from affirming the loving patience of God since a timeless God cannot be patient.

Let us take a closer look at 2 Peter 3. The context of the passage involves Peter considering an objection to the eschatological claims of the gospel.⁴⁵⁸ Peter comments on the fact that some scoff at Christians for proclaiming that Christ will come again and judge creation. The scoffers point out that things appear to be the way that they have always been with no signs of a coming judgment. Peter rebukes such claims as impatient and invokes the *simile* of "a thousand years as one day" as a way to demonstrate God's patience as compared to ours. The everlasting God does not count slowness as the scoffers do. A thousand years is a long time for us, but not for a God who exists from "everlasting to everlasting." The main thrust of Peter's claims is to call the believer to be patient and rest assured that God has His reasons for waiting to return. God, according to Peter, has a very good reason for waiting. God is patient towards us so that all might reach repentance since He does not wish for anyone to perish. That is a very patient God for, it seems to me, God will have to wait a very

⁴⁵⁷ See my "Simply Impossible: A Case Against Divine Simplicity," *The Journal of Reformed Theology* (Forthcoming).

⁴⁵⁸ J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969), 360-62. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 304.

long time for all to reach repentance.⁴⁵⁹ This passage, like Psalm 90, is profoundly temporal in its description of God. God is described as patiently waiting to return at a time that He decreed for a specific purpose, and this is something a timeless God cannot do. A timeless God cannot patiently wait. As Richard Bauckham makes clear, “[t]he intended contrast between man’s perception of time and God’s is not a reference to God’s eternity in the sense of atemporality... The point is rather that God’s perspective on time is not limited by a human life span.”⁴⁶⁰ To read 2 Peter 3 in terms of divine timelessness is to completely gut the passage of any meaning. Ultimately, it robs the hope of the gospel from the believer since it entails a denial of what the passage teaches. A timeless God cannot be patient, and the passage teaches that God is extremely patient. So much the worse for divine timelessness!

Truthmaker Theory

Another issue that space did not allow for is truthmaker theory. This issue is relevant to debates about the ontology of time as well as about the doctrine of omniscience. Is presentism compatible with truthmaker theory? Is truthmaker theory coherent? Can God know the future? There are extensive and ongoing discussions of these questions, but a full examination is beyond the bounds of this project. In this section I shall note some of the relevant issues for the philosophy of time and theology.

The intuition behind truthmaker theory is that every truth claim or proposition has a truthmaker—something that makes the proposition true. This is called *Truthmaker Maximalism*. Another intuition is called *Truthmaker Necessitarianism* which is the thesis that the truthmakers must necessitate the truths that they make

⁴⁵⁹ For more on this, listen to my sermon, “Time and the Everlasting God,” http://www.clermontcc.org/Clermont_Christian_Church/Media/Archive.html.

⁴⁶⁰ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 310.

true.⁴⁶¹ The big idea, then, is that there is something about the world that makes every truth claim true. In other words, truth is grounded in the way the world is, or truth supervenes on being. What makes <the grass is green> true? The fact that there is in the world grass that instantiates the property *green*, makes the proposition <the grass is green> true. Any patch of grass can serve as the truthmaker for this. There is not a one-to-one correspondence between all propositions and truthmakers. The relationship between propositions and truthmakers is one-to-many in most instances.

The four-dimensional eternalist will say that truthmaker theory entails eternalism and is in direct conflict with presentism. Truthmaker theory is said to conflict with presentism in the following way. There are truths about the past, but on presentism the past no longer exists. What makes it true that <Caesar existed>? The times at which Caesar existed no longer exist on presentism.⁴⁶² To put a theological spin on the objection, what makes it true that <Christ atoned for our sins>? On presentism the significance of Christ's death seems to be swept away with the flow of time. How can the work of Christ have any meaning for our lives if that state of affairs no longer exists?⁴⁶³

Presentists respond to objections like this in many different ways. One option advocated by Trenton Merricks is to say that truthmaker theory is false.⁴⁶⁴ Not all propositions need a truthmaker. For instance, necessary propositions, like those of mathematics and logic, are necessarily true. Nothing makes these propositions true. They simply are true. So truthmaker theory is false. Further, truthmaker theory cannot seem to handle negative existential propositions like <unicorns do not exist.> Within the confines of standard truthmaker theory, there is nothing that can serve as the

⁴⁶¹ D.M. Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5-7.

⁴⁶² Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers*, chapter 11.

⁴⁶³ Thanks to Alan Torrance and Jeremy Tudor for pushing me on this.

⁴⁶⁴ Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

truthmaker for this proposition, and yet we know it is true. So, again, truthmaker theory is false.

Other presentists take a different option. Instead of rejecting truthmaker theory, many opt for a modified version of truthmaker theory.⁴⁶⁵ In fact, most truthmaker theorists in general agree that truthmaker needs to be revised. However, there is no consensus on what this revised version looks like.⁴⁶⁶ Some wish to ground truths about the past in an ersatz b-theory of time where tenseless propositions about the past serve as the truthmakers. Others seek to ground truths about the past in the infallible knowledge of God. Another option is to ground truths about the past in properties that the world currently possesses. For instance, what makes it true that <Christ atoned for our sins>? The fact that God the Son exists now and currently exemplifies certain properties serves as the truthmaker. It is true that the Son was crucified. Being *the one who was crucified* is an enduring property of the Son. It is something that will forever be true about Him.

This is a fascinating area of ongoing research, but again, a full discussion cannot be had here. What is relevant for the argument of this project is that, even if truthmaker theory does entail an eternalist ontology of time, God cannot be regarded as timeless. However, it is not clear that truthmaker theory entails an eternalist ontology of time since truthmaker theory is currently being revised or outright rejected. How one responds to truthmaker theory will have an impact on one's theology.

⁴⁶⁵ Thomas Crisp, "Presentism and the Grounding Objection," *Nous* 41 (2007). Brian Kierland and Bradley Monton, "Presentism and the Objection From Being-Supervenience," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85 (2007). Craig Bourne, *A Future for Presentism*, 52-69. Alan Rhoda, "Presentism, Truthmakers, and God," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90 (2009). Jonathan Tallant, "Presentism and Truth-Making," *Erkenntnis* 71 (2009). Alex Baia, "Presentism and the Grounding of Truth," *Philosophical Studies* 159 (2012). John Bigelow and Neil McKinnon. "Presentism, and Speaking of the Dead." *Philosophical Studies* 160 (2012).

⁴⁶⁶ Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Truthmakers," *Philosophy Compass* 1 (2006), 187.

What is relevant for future work in theology with regard to truthmaker theory is whether or not God can know the future. Most divine temporalists today are presentists, but they disagree about whether or not God knows the future. Divine temporalists will claim that the presentist can account for truths about the past, but not all agree that the presentist can account for truths about the future. Calvinists and Molinists who are divine temporalists will say that there are determinate truths about the future, and God has an exhaustive knowledge of these truths.⁴⁶⁷ Open theists, however, disagree. There is some debate amongst Open theists about whether or not there are truths about the future, but the more sophisticated versions of contemporary Open theism hold that most propositions about the future do not have a determinate truth-value of true or false.⁴⁶⁸ In particular, the Open theist says that propositions about what creatures will freely do in the future do not have a determinate truth-value.

Here is where truths about the future connect with omniscience. As discussed in chapter 4, omniscience is traditionally defined as God knowing all truths and no falsehoods. For every true proposition, God knows that it is true, and for every false proposition God knows that it is false. Take the proposition <Sam will choose to propose to Sally next Friday>. A Calvinist and a Molinist will say that this proposition has a determinate truth-value, and God, being omniscient, knows what that truth-value is. The Open theist, however, will say that this proposition does not have a determinate truth-value. It is neither true nor false. Since an omniscient God knows all truths and no falsehoods, and this proposition is neither true nor false, there

⁴⁶⁷ For a Calvinist perspective see John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001). For a Molinist perspective see William Lane Craig in, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁴⁶⁸ Dean Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, Presentism, and Open Theism," in ed. Melville Y. Stewart, *Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010). Alan R. Rhoda, "The Fivefold Openness of the Future," in *God in an Open Universe*.

is nothing for God to know. So, an omniscient God does not have exhaustive knowledge of the future.

This is a topic of much debate in the contemporary literature, but I suggest that future work needs to be done in the following areas. First, the actual implications of truthmaker theory for the status of propositions about the future need to be established. Since it is not clear which version of truthmaker theory, if any, will ultimately be deemed to be true, it is not clear what the entailments of truthmaker theory are for propositions about the future. So, theologians should be cautious when articulating theories of omniscience in light of truthmaker theory.

Second, the biblical material seems to testify to the fact that God knows a great deal more about the future than the average Open theist will allow for. It also seems to present a God who is engaged in meticulous divine providence, and not the risk taking God of Open theism. It is the case that some Open theists have tried to rebut this challenge by abandoning a risky God, and offering accounts of God's providence that appear to be quite meticulous.⁴⁶⁹ It is even claimed that God can, if necessary, override our freedom to bring about certain states of affairs that He desires to bring about.⁴⁷⁰ If Open theists make these claims, it needs to be made clear what the difference is between them and Calvinists.

Third, when one says that propositions about the future do not have a determinate truth-value of true or false, one has to rewrite certain fundamental laws of logic, like, say, abandon the principle of bivalence.⁴⁷¹ That is not a desirable to situation to say the least. Suffice it to say, theologians should be cautious when

⁴⁶⁹ Alan R. Rhoda, "Beyond the Chess Master Analogy: Game Theory and Divine Providence," in, ed. Thomas Jay Oord, *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

⁴⁷⁰ Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, Presentism, and Open Theism," in, *Science and Religion in Dialogue*, 792.

⁴⁷¹ Craig Bourne, "Fatalism and the Future," in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time*, 46-60.

fleshing out the supposed philosophical and theological implications of truthmaker theory.⁴⁷²

The Trinity

Another issue that one might raise is whether there might not have been further discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity. As noted in chapter 2, within some theological circles the doctrine of the Trinity has been used to argue that God must be temporal, or must be timeless. It is not clear what the argument is from the Trinity to divine temporality, despite the fact that several have suggested there is one. Further, some of these so-called Trinitarian divine temporalists end up saying the most bizarre things like the Father is timeless, the Son transcends time but is also simultaneous with all of time, and the Holy Spirit experiences time according to presentism.⁴⁷³ It is not clear what this means, nor is there any good reason for projecting these types of distinctions into the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁷⁴ Further, this clearly destroys the homoousious of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit since each has different essential properties.

I do, however, feel some of the force of the argument from the Trinity to divine timelessness. Paul Helm, for instance, once argued that divine timelessness is needed to avoid Arianism. He has softened this argument in recent years, and I have offered a refutation elsewhere.⁴⁷⁵ The problem, however, is not divine timelessness or

⁴⁷² Amy Seymour has told me that her version of Open theism does not abandon the principle of bivalence. She says that all propositions about the future have a determinate truth-value, and all the values are false. I'm assuming she has some nuance to allow for things that God has determined about the future like the defeat of evil such that the proposition <God will defeat evil> is true. I await the details of her account before I can properly assess it.

⁴⁷³ Reinhold Bernhardt, "Timeless Action? Temporality and/or Eternity in God's Being and Acting," in ed. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier, *God, Eternity, and Time* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 131-3.

⁴⁷⁴ Antje Jackelen, *Time and Eternity: The Question of Time in Church, Science, and Theology* (London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005), 190-7.

⁴⁷⁵ "Divine Temporality and the Charge of Arianism," (Forthcoming).

temporality. The problem is with the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. The way the traditional doctrine is articulated simply entails Arianism. In order to avoid Arianism, one must get rid of the claim that the Son and Holy Spirit are eternally caused to exist by the Father. The Christian theologian should not be concerned about giving up this claim since it is not biblically grounded.

The Real Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to argue that the Christian God cannot be timeless. I have also argued that there is no such thing as a third way between timelessness and temporal. So that leaves us with the claim that God is temporal. My suggestion is that theologians and philosophers should abandon the divine timeless research program because it is unworkable and devastating to Christian theology. Instead, they should devote their attention to developing divine temporality and the implications that has for the rest of Christian theology. Divine timelessness has had a long run in Church history, but it is time to bury it, and move on.

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