



The coherence of theism - part 1

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William Lane Craig considers one of the central concerns in the Philosophy of Religion - the coherence of theism. In the first of two highly philosophical articles, Craig considers the theistic attributes of necessity, aseity, incorporeality, omnipresence and eternity. The second article considers God's omniscience, simplicity, immutability, omnipotence and goodness. The audio file covers only the attribute of omniscience, but can be accessed from part 1 or part 2 of the notes.

THE COHERENCE OF THEISM (Part 1)

"It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father."--Charles Spurgeon, Sunday Morning Sermon, January 7, 1855.

Introduction

One of the central concerns of contemporary Philosophy of Religion is the **coherence of theism**, or the analysis of the attributes of God. During the generation previous to our own the concept of God was often regarded as fertile ground for anti-theistic arguments. The difficulty with theism, it was said, was not merely that there

are no good arguments for the existence of God, but, more fundamentally, that the notion of God is incoherent.

*This anti-theistic critique has evoked a prodigious literature devoted to the philosophical analysis of the concept of God. Two controls have tended to guide this inquiry into the divine nature: Scripture and **Perfect Being theology**. For thinkers in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, God's self-revelation in Scripture is obviously paramount in understanding what God is like. In addition, the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of Scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a "great-making" property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judaeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God. Theists thus found that anti-theistic critiques of certain conceptions of God could actually be quite helpful in framing a more adequate conception. Thus, far from undermining theism, the anti-theistic critiques have served mainly to reveal how rich and challenging is the concept of God, thereby refining and strengthening theistic belief.*

Necessity

Ever since Aristotle, God has been conceived in Western philosophical theology as a **necessarily existent being** (ens necessarium). Christian theologians interpreted the revelation of the divine name "I am that I am" (Ex. 3.14) to express the same idea. For Aristotle, God's necessary existence probably meant simply His immunity to generation and corruption. The Aristotelian conception finds its counterpart among those contemporary philosophers who defend the idea of God's **"factual" necessity**. According to this notion, God exists necessarily in the sense that, given that God exists, it is impossible that He ever came into or will go out of existence. He is uncaused, eternal, incorruptible, and indestructible. During the Middle Ages, however, Islamic philosophers such as al-Farabi began to enunciate an even more powerful conception of

*God's necessity: God's non-existence is logically impossible. This conception of necessary existence lay at the heart of Anselm's ontological argument: if God's non-existence is logically impossible, it follows that He must exist. On this view God is not merely factually necessary, but **logically necessary** in His being.*

Powerful theological and philosophical reasons can be given for taking God's existence to be logically necessary. Philosophically, the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being implies His necessary existence in this sense, since logically contingent existence is not as great as necessary existence. Certain forms of the contingency argument for God's existence terminate in a logically necessary being, for only such a being can supply an adequate answer to the question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" The conceptualist argument for God's existence also entails the existence of a logically necessary being in order to ground the realm of abstract objects. The moral argument leads naturally to such a being, since moral values and principles are not plausibly logically contingent. Theologically speaking, a God who just happens to exist (even eternally and without cause) seems less satisfactory religiously than one whose non-existence is impossible. Mere factual necessity thus does not seem to capture the fullness of divine being.

Since the critiques of Hume and Kant, however, philosophers have until recently widely rejected the notion of God as a logically necessary being. It was often said that to speak of a logically necessary being is flatly a category mistake; propositions are logically necessary or contingent with respect to their truth value, but beings are no more necessary or contingent than they are true or false. If one replied that the theist means to hold that the proposition God exists is necessarily true, then the response was that existential propositions (that is, those which assert the existence of something) are uniformly contingent. Besides, the proposition God does not exist is not a contradiction, so that God exists cannot be logically necessary. Moreover, many philosophers insisted that the distinction between necessary/contingent truth is merely a result of linguistic convention, so that it becomes merely conventional to assert that God necessarily exists.

*Philosophical reflection over the last quarter century has largely overturned these critiques. The development of **possible worlds semantics** has provided a useful means of expressing the theist's claim. To say that God is a logically necessary being is to say that God exists in every possible world ("God" in this case being a proper name and, hence, rigidly designating its referent, that is to say, picking out the same entity in every possible world in which it exists). In other words, the proposition God exists is true in every possible world. There is no good reason to think that such an existential proposition cannot be true in every possible world, for many philosophers make precisely similar claims about the necessary existence of various abstract objects like numbers, properties, propositions, and so forth. Though abstract, such objects are thought by many philosophers to exist, in Plantinga's words, just as serenely as your most solidly concrete object. [i] Thus, it would be special pleading to privilege these objects with necessary existence while denying the possibility of God's existing necessarily.*

*Furthermore, the modality operative in possible worlds semantics is not **strict logical necessity/possibility**, but **broad logical necessity/possibility**. Strictly speaking there is no logical impossibility in the proposition The Prime Minister is a prime number; but we should not want to say, therefore, that there is a possible world in which this proposition is true. Broad logical possibility is usually construed in terms of **actualizability** and is therefore often understood as **metaphysical possibility**. There are no clear criteria which can be applied mechanically to determine whether a proposition is metaphysically necessary/impossible. One chiefly has to rely on intuition or conceivability. Propositions which are not strictly logically contradictory may nonetheless be metaphysically impossible, for example, This table could have been made of ice or Socrates could have been a hippopotamus. Similarly, propositions need not be tautologous (like If it is raining, then it is raining) or analytic (like Even numbers are divisible by two) in order to be metaphysically necessary; for example, Gold has the atomic number 79, Whatever begins to exist has a cause, or Everything that has a shape has a size. Intuitions may differ over whether some proposition is metaphysically necessary/impossible. Thus, with respect to the*

proposition God exists, the fact that the negation of this proposition is not a contradiction in no way shows that the proposition is not metaphysically necessary. Similarly, the proposition that Nothing exists is not a logical contradiction, but that does not show that the proposition is broadly logically possible. If one has some reason to think that a metaphysically necessary being exists, then it would be question-begging to reject this conclusion solely on the grounds that it seems possible that nothing should exist.

Finally, as for the **conventionalist theory of necessity**, such a construal of modal notions is not only unjustified but enormously implausible. As Plantinga points out, [ii] the linguistic conventionalist confuses **sentences** with **propositions**. Sentences are linguistic entities composed of words; propositions are the information content expressed by declarative sentences. We can imagine situations in which the sentence "Either God exists or He does not" would not have expressed the proposition it in fact does and so might have been neither necessary nor true; but that goes no distance toward proving that the proposition it does express is neither necessary nor true. Moreover, it seems quite incredible to think that the necessity of this proposition is in any wise affected by our determination to use words in a certain way. Could it really be the case that God both exists and does not exist?

The conception of God as a necessary being in a broadly logical sense thus seems a coherent notion which properly belongs to Christian theism.

Aseity

Aseity (from the Latin *a se* "by itself") refers to God's self-existence or independence. God does not merely exist in every possible world (as great as that is) but, even more greatly, He exists in every world wholly independently of anything else. The Scripture affirms the pre-existent divine Word: "All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1.3). God is unique in His aseity; all other things exist *ab alio* (through another).

Divine aseity confronts a serious challenge from one of the oldest and most persistent of philosophical doctrines: **Platonism**, which holds

that in addition to concrete objects like people and planets there also exist separate realms of abstract objects like numbers and sets and propositions and properties. These objects, though abstract and usually held to exist beyond time and space, are nonetheless every bit as real as the familiar physical objects of our daily experience. They exist necessarily, for it is inconceivable that there should exist, for example, a possible world lacking in numbers or propositions, even if that world were altogether devoid of concrete objects other than God Himself. Moreover, --and this is the crucial point-- they exist *a se*. There is no cause of the existence of such entities; they each exist independently of one another and of God. It is this feature of Platonism, more than any other, which has troubled many Christian theists. Not only is there an infinite number of such objects (there is an infinite number of natural numbers alone), but there are higher and higher orders of infinities of such objects, infinities of infinities, so that God is utterly dwarfed by their unimaginable multitude. God finds Himself amidst uncreated, infinite realms of beings which exist just as necessarily and independently as He. The dependence of physical creation upon God for its existence becomes an infinitesimal triviality in comparison with the existence of the infinitude of beings that exist independently of Him. Platonism thus entails a **metaphysical pluralism** which is incompatible with the unique aseity of God.

Some contemporary Christian philosophers have sought to reconcile the existence of such abstract objects with divine aseity by denying that these objects exist *a se*, even if they exist necessarily. According to this **modified Platonism**, while such objects exist in every possible world, they are nonetheless created beings, just as are physical objects. They are not created by God at any time but rather are timelessly created by Him. God is not temporally prior to the existence of such objects, but He is causally or **explanatorily prior** to their existence.

But two problems threaten to spoil this simple solution: (1) Since such entities exist necessarily, they are obviously independent of the divine will. God is not free to refrain from creating such beings. But central to the Christian doctrine of **creation** is the conviction that creation is the freely-willed act of God, that God, had He wished,

could have remained alone without any exigency of producing a world of creatures. (2) Even more seriously, the solution seems incoherent. For in order to create, say, properties, God must already exemplify certain properties. In order to create the property being powerful, for example, God must already have the property of being powerful. (Recall that according to Platonism properties exist apart from their instances or abstract particulars.) God cannot coherently be said to create His own properties, since in order to create them, He must already possess them. Of course, God and properties both exist timelessly on the proposed view, but it turns out that God's properties must be explanatorily prior to their own existence, which is incoherent.

Historically, the majority of Christian theologians have not embraced modified Platonism. Rather most have followed St. Augustine in adopting some form of **conceptualism** as an account of the existence of abstract objects. Augustine identified the Platonic forms with the **Divine Ideas**, holding that abstract objects have a conceptual reality as the contents of God's mind. Thus, they do not exist independently of God nor even outside of God but only within His mind. Thus, the number seven, the proposition that $2+2=4$, and the property of redness, for example, are all ideas conceived by God.

Conceptualism offers responses to the difficulties raised in connection with modified Platonism. (1) Since the divine ideas belong to the divine mind and are not externally existing abstract objects, they are not part of the created order. Thus, their necessary existence is not incompatible with the freely-willed character of creation. Even in possible worlds in which God refrains from creation, He still exists with His ideas. Just as moral values are rooted in the moral nature of God such that His moral commands are necessary expressions of His nature, so the divine mind operates in accord with logically necessary truths. The necessity of logic and mathematics may be seen as grounded in the necessity of God's intellect. (2) If abstract objects have a conceptual reality, then they do not exist explanatorily prior to God's conception of them. That does not entail that God is not in that explanatorily prior moment omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, and all the rest. Just as medieval theologians like Boethius, Aquinas, and

Ockham thought of a conceptualized universal property as explanatorily posterior to the relevant abstract particular, so God's being in a certain way need not be construed in terms of instantiating a universal; rather the universal is conceptually abstracted from the particular. Thus, in order for properties and other abstract objects to be the result of divine intellection, they need not exist prior to themselves.

These are extremely difficult and unresolved issues, and we can look forward to further discussion of modified Platonist, conceptualist, and other perspectives on divine aseity on the part of Christian philosophers. For now, we can agree that God is uniquely self-existent, and abstract objects should be thought of as in some way grounded in God.

Incorporeality

"God is spirit" (Jn 4.24), that is to say, a living, immaterial substance. God's **immateriality** entails the divine attribute of **incorporeality**, that God is neither a body nor embodied. As a personal being, God is therefore of the order of unembodied Mind.

Scientific naturalism and in particular physicalism cannot abide the doctrine of divine incorporeality. Since all that exists is physical in nature or at least supervenient or dependent upon the physical, there can be no such entity as an unembodied Mind existing beyond the universe. How such a Mind could causally affect the world, so as to be its Creator and Sustainer, is said to be wholly mysterious. Thus if incorporeality belongs to the concept of God, it follows that God does not exist.

This challenge to divine incorporeality is reminiscent of the physicalist critique of mind/body dualism with respect to philosophical anthropology, and, doubtlessly, the most effective way to meet this challenge will be to employ customary arguments offered in support of the mind as a mental substance. For if the coherence of finite minds distinct from the body can be defended, so analogously can the coherence of an infinite Mind distinct from the world. It is noteworthy therefore that the failure of reductive materialism has become patent to most thinkers in contemporary philosophy of mind and that the

leading views are therefore either non-reductive versions of physicalism or not physicalist at all. But non-reductive physicalism, which arguably must view mental states as mere epiphenomena of brain states, cannot be plausibly squared with our first-hand experience of ourselves. Moreover, since there is no enduring self on such theories, but just a temporal succession of mental states, personal identity across time (diachronic identity) is impossible. And yet I do grasp myself as an enduring self. We should rightly hold someone deranged who really believed that he has not existed longer than the present instant, that his memories are not in fact his, that he has himself never before done or said or thought anything. On such theories moral praise or blame become meaningless, since one's present mental state cannot be held responsible or praised for prior actions associated with quite distinct mental states. Moreover, given the causal impotence of epiphenomenal mental states, no one can be held accountable anyway for actions carried out by the body alone. For the same reason epiphenomenalism squeezes out freedom of the will, since the direction of causal influence between consciousness and the body is exclusively a one-way street. Not only does such a view fly in the face of our first-hand experience of ourselves as causally efficacious agents, but it raises two further problems as well. (1) Such a deterministic view of human agency cannot be rationally affirmed. For if our thought life is merely the byproduct of our material make-up and external stimuli, then the decision to believe that determinism is true can be no more rational than having a toothache. (2) Such a view is incompatible with evolutionary biology, since causally impotent mental states, which merely ride along, as it were, on physical states, can confer no advantage in the struggle for survival. Indeed, we might be led to question whether anything at all that we believe is veridical, given that the bodily states on which our beliefs supervene have evolved only under the pressure of survival, not success in grasping truth. For all these reasons, the view that minds are immaterial substances is at the very least coherent, in which case theism stands unconvicted of incoherence in affirming God's incorporeality.

The problem of divine interaction with the world also mirrors the issue raised by dualist-interactionist views of the mind and the body. Our

inability to explain how the mind influences the body should not lead us to doubt our first-hand knowledge that it does. We apprehend ourselves as causes; indeed, our grasp of the notion of causation probably comes primarily from our acquaintance with ourselves as causally efficacious agents. Moreover, we saw that the question itself may well be malposed, for it seems to assume the necessity of some intermediate causal linkage between cause and effect, which is precluded by the nature of the case. Because God, in particular, acts immediately in creating, there can in principle be no intermediate, since creation constitutes in being its object.

The parallel of dualism-interactionism and God-world relations suggests that God's actions in the world are like the basic actions we undertake in our bodies. In a basic action we do not perform some action by means of undertaking to do something else; rather we undertake to perform some action immediately, as when I will to raise my arm. Just as I, as an immaterial substance, can perform basic actions with respect to my body, so God can by merely willing bring about effects in the world. The world, is as it were, the instrumental equivalent of God's body.

Should we push the analogy further and affirm with **Process theism** that God then does have a body after all, that the world is the body of God and God the soul the world? Is the analogy so entire as to suggest that although God has created the world ex nihilo, it nonetheless has come to embody Him? It seems not. For the crucial disanalogy between the world and the body is that the world does not function for God either as a material substratum of consciousness or as a sense organ through which He perceives the external world. Our souls, while embodied, are somehow and in some respects dependent upon our bodily states as a physical grounding for consciousness and as a means of perceiving reality outside ourselves. But nothing comparable to this is true in God's case. The human brain is the most complex structure in the universe, and there is nothing in the physical world which could serve as a substratum for an omniscient Mind. Moreover, God's knowledge, as we shall see, should not be construed along the lines of perception.

In short, while the soul-body relation works nicely

as an analogy for God-world relations in an active sense, it is not analogous in the passive sense. God is ontologically distinct from His creation.

Omnipresence

The comparison of the God-world relation and the mind-body relation naturally raises the question of how we are to understand God's presence in creation. As an incorporeal being, God is clearly not to be thought of as localized in space, having a certain circumscribed size and shape. The Scriptures present God as **omnipresent**, or everywhere present, in His creation in virtue of His incorporeality:

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?

Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!

If I take the wings of the morning

And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Even there thy hand shall lead me,

And thy right hand shall hold me (Ps. 139. 7-10).

But how are we to understand this? Just as we do not think of God as localized in space neither should we conceive of Him as extended throughout space like some sort of an all-pervasive ether. Just as incorporeality is incompatible with a locally circumscribed deity, so it is incompatible with such a universally extended deity, who would be imbued with the size and shape of space itself (which would be constantly changing as space expands) and who could not be wholly present at all places simultaneously but could only have parts which would occupy corresponding parts of space. In some way God must be wholly present to all points in space at once.

Again, analogies of the soul-body relation are instructive. Some philosophers of mind hold that the soul is spatially present in the body. Our selves seem to have spatial location: I, for example, am here in this room and not at the

bottom of the Marianas Trench or struggling on the steeps of Patagonia. Nonetheless, as an incorporeal entity, my soul does not have spatial extension. So according to these thinkers, the soul has a spatial location but lacks spatial extension. It is present in its respective body but is not extended throughout it like a humanoid ghost. Nor is it confined to some part of the body, such as the brain, but is somehow wholly present at all points in its body. On the other hand, some mind-body theorists deny that the soul is spatially located at all. Its perceptions are relative to a certain vantage point, the location of its body, through which it experiences and acts in the world. For that reason it appears that our selves are spatially located; indeed, each of us fancies himself to be the center of the universe. But the mind itself is not a spatial entity and so lacks either location or extension in space.

Similarly, we can say either that God is spatially located in the universe but is wholly present at every point in it or else that God is not spatially located in the universe but is causally active at every point in it. Are there any reasons for preferring one of these conceptions of divine omnipresence over the other? Divine **spacelessness** could be easily deduced from certain construals of other divine attributes. For example, if God is timeless or immutable, He could not exist in space, since any spatially located entity will be constantly changing in relation to other spatial things. But since timelessness and immutability are very controversial doctrines, we ought to ask if there are independent arguments for our interpretation of divine omnipresence. The idea that a concrete entity can be wholly present at spatially separated points is certainly a difficult conception. It might seem to require us to say that God, wholly present at every point, would believe that two points separated by billions of light years are both "here," which is incoherent. But perhaps one could avoid a multiplicity of "here's" for God by stipulating that God's "here" is co-extensive with the entire universe, so that space as a whole is "here" for Him.

A better reason for thinking that God transcends space is that we know, in virtue of the doctrine of creation, that God existing alone without creation is spaceless. For on a **relational view of space**, space does not exist in the utter absence of any

physical reality, and on a **substantival view of space**, space is a thing or substance and therefore must have been created by God. In either case, then, God brings space into being at the moment of His creation of the universe. Without creation, therefore, God exists spacelessly. But the creation of space would do nothing to "spatialize" God, that is to say, to draw Him into space. The creating of space is not itself a spatial act (as is, say, bumping something). Hence, there is just no reason to think that divine spacelessness is surrendered in the act of creation. If not, then omnipresence should be understood in terms of God's being immediately cognizant of and causally active at every point in space. He knows what is happening at every spatial location in the universe and He is causally operative at every such point, even if nothing more is going on there than quantum fluctuations in the vacuum of "empty" space.

God's spacelessness would be the functional equivalent of an embedding **hyper-dimension** of space. Just as a three-dimensional being could act in the two-dimensional plane in ways that would appear mysterious to the inhabitants of this Flatland, so the transcendent God can act immediately at any point in our three-dimensional world. Charmed by this image, a few thinkers have even thought to construe God as literally a hyper-dimensional being existing in an embedding space-time. But this metaphysical extravagance actually gives up what has been achieved by our construing divine omnipresence in terms of spacelessness without accruing any new advantage. Talk of embedding hyper-space inhabited by God should be taken as an illustrative device without ontological significance. It seems best to say that God literally exists spacelessly but is present at every point in space in the sense that He is cognizant of and causally active at every point in space.

Eternity

The question of God's relationship to space naturally raises the question of His relationship to time as well. That God is eternal is the clear teaching of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures (Ps. 90.2), and God's eternality also follows from divine necessity. For if God exists necessarily, it is impossible that He not exist; therefore He can never go out of or come into being. God just

exists, without beginning or end, which is a minimalist definition of what it means to say that God is eternal.

But there is considerable disagreement concerning the nature of divine **eternity**. Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas argued that God transcends time, just as He does space, and therefore has His whole life at once (*tota simul*). Such thinkers often say that from the standpoint of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*) the entire series of temporal events is real to God and thus available for His causal influence at any point in history through a single timeless act. On the other hand, Aristotle may well have taken God's eternity to be everlasting temporal duration, and Duns Scotus sharply criticized the atemporalist view of Aquinas on the grounds that time, being dynamic by nature, cannot co-exist as a whole with God. Isaac Newton, the father of modern physics, in his General Scholium to his great *Principia Mathematica*, founded his doctrine of absolute time upon God's infinite temporal duration, and in our day process philosophers and theologians like Whitehead and Hartshorne have vigorously asserted the temporalist view.

Why think that God exists timelessly? God's atemporality could be successfully deduced from His simplicity and immutability, for if God is absolutely simple, He stands in no real relations whatsoever, including temporal relations of earlier/later than, and if God is absolutely immutable, then He cannot change in any way, which, if He is in time, He must do, at least extrinsically, as things co-present with Him change. But as we shall see in the next chapter, these extra-biblical doctrines are highly controversial and now widely rejected, so that one needs to look for other grounds of one's doctrine of divine eternity.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument in favor of divine timelessness is based on the incompleteness of temporal life. Shakespeare's melancholy lines,

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
V.v.21)

are a poignant reminder of the evanescence of temporal life. Our yesterdays are gone, and our

tomorrows we do not yet have. The fleeting present is our only claim on existence. There is thus a transiency and incompleteness to temporal life that seems incompatible with the life of a most perfect being.

On the other hand, there do seem to be good reasons, too, for affirming divine temporality. If God is really related to the world, then it is extraordinarily difficult to see how God could remain untouched by the world's temporality. For simply in virtue of His being related to changing things (even if He Himself remains intrinsically changeless), there would exist a before and after in God's life. Aquinas escaped the force of this reasoning only by insisting that God stands in no real relation to the world--a position that seems fantastic in light of God's being the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann try to craft an **Eternal-Temporal simultaneity relation** between God and creatures to try to preserve God's atemporality. Their basic idea is as follows: Take some atemporal being x and some temporal being y . These two are ET-simultaneous just in case relative to some hypothetical observer in the eternal reference frame x is eternally present and y is observed as temporally present, and relative to some hypothetical observer in any temporal reference frame y is temporally present and x is observed as eternally present. The problem with this account is that the notion of observation employed in the definition is wholly obscure. No hint is given as to what is meant, for example, by x 's being observed as eternally present relative to some moment of time. In the absence of any procedure for determining ET-simultaneity, the definition reduces to the assertion that relative to the reference frame of eternity x is eternally present and y is temporally present and that relative to some temporal reference frame y is temporally present and x is eternally present--which is only a restatement of the problem! Stump and Kretzmann later revised their definition of ET-simultaneity so as to free it from observation language. Basically, their new account tries to define ET-simultaneity in terms of causal relations. On the new definition, x and y are ET-simultaneous just in case relative to an observer in the eternal reference frame, x is eternally present and y is temporally present, and the observer can enter into direct causal relations

with both x and y ; and relative to an observer in any temporal reference frame, x is eternally present and y is at the same time as the observer, and the observer can enter into direct causal relations with both x and y . The fundamental problem with this new account of ET-simultaneity is that it is viciously circular. For ET-simultaneity was originally invoked to explain how a timeless God could be causally active in time; but now ET-simultaneity is defined in terms of a timeless being's ability to be causally active in time. This amounts to saying that God can be causally active in time because He can be causally active in time!

Brian Leftow tries to remedy the defects in the Stump-Kretzmann theory by proposing a theory according to which temporal entities exist in timeless eternity as well as in time and so can be causally related to God. Leftow argues as follows: there can be no change of place relative to God because the distance between the transcendent God and everything in space is zero. But if there is no change of place relative to God, there can be no change of any sort on the part of spatial things relative to God. Moreover, since anything that is temporal is also spatial, it follows that there are no temporal, non-spatial beings. The only temporal beings there are exist in space, and none of these changes relative to God. Assuming, then, some relational view of time, according to which time cannot exist without change, it follows that all temporal beings exist timelessly relative to God. Thus, relative to God all things are timelessly present and so can be causally related to God.

The fundamental problem with this reasoning is that it commits a serious category mistake. When we say that there is no distance between God and creatures, we do not mean that there is a distance and its measure is zero. Rather we mean that the category of distance does not even apply to the relations between a non-spatial being like God and things in space. Hence, it does not follow that things in space are changeless relative to God; but without this premise the rest of Leftow's theory collapses. In short, God's real relation to a temporal, changing world implies divine temporality.

A second powerful argument for divine temporality is based on God's being all-knowing.

In order to know the truth of propositions expressed by tensed sentences like "Christ is risen from the dead" God must exist temporally. For such knowledge locates the knower relative to the present. Hermetically sealed in timeless eternity, God could not know such tensed facts as whether Christ has died or has yet to be born. God's knowledge of the history of the world would be like the knowledge a film producer has of a movie as it lies in the can: he knows what is on every frame, but he has no idea what is now being projected on the screen. Similarly, all a timeless God could know would be tenseless truths like Christ dies in AD 30, but He would have no idea whether Christ has actually died yet or not. Such ignorance is inconsistent with the standard account of omniscience, which requires that God know all truths, and is surely incompatible with God's maximal cognitive excellence. To date no satisfactory account of how a timeless God could know tensed truths has been forthcoming. The proposals advanced by thinkers like Leftow, Jonathan Kvanvig, and Edward Wierenga all, upon examination, turn out to deny God knowledge of tensed facts.

We thus have comparatively weak grounds for affirming divine timelessness but two powerful arguments in favor of divine temporality. It would seem, then, that we should conclude that God is temporal. But such a conclusion would be premature. For there does remain one way of escape still open for defenders of divine timelessness. The argument based on God's real relation to the world assumed the objective reality of temporal becoming, and the argument based on God's knowledge of the temporal world assumed the objective reality of tensed facts. If one denies the objective reality of temporal becoming and tensed facts, then the arguments are undercut. For in that case, nothing to which God is related ever changes, and all facts are tenseless, so that God undergoes neither relational nor intrinsic change. He can be the immutable, omniscient Sustainer and Knower of all things and, hence, exist timelessly.

In short, the defender of divine timelessness can escape the two arguments by embracing the static or B-Theory of time. Divine timelessness thus stands or falls with the static theory of time.[iii] If we adopt a dynamic or A-Theory of time, as we think we ought, we should conclude

that God is temporal.

But if God is temporal in virtue of His relation to and knowledge of a temporal world, what about His state without the world? Did God exist literally before creation? Has He existed for infinite time, from eternity past? Is not such a hypothesis contradicted by the kalam cosmological argument against the infinitude of the past?

*Strictly speaking, the argument for the finitude of the past did not reach the conclusion, "Therefore, time began to exist." Rather what it proved, if successful, is that there cannot have been an infinite past, that is to say, a past which is composed of an infinite number of equal temporal intervals. But some philosophers have argued that in the absence of any empirical measures, there is no objective fact that one interval of time is longer or shorter than another distinct interval. Prior to creation it is impossible to differentiate between a tenth of a second and ten trillion years. There is no moment, say, one hour before creation. Time literally lacks any **intrinsic metric**. God existing alone without the universe would thus not endure through an infinite number of, say, hours, prior to the moment of creation.*

*Such an understanding of God's time prior to creation seems quite attractive. Nevertheless, a close inspection of the view reveals difficulties. Even in a **metrically amorphous time**, there are objective factual differences of length for certain temporal intervals. For in the case of intervals which are enclosed in other intervals, the enclosed intervals are factually shorter than their encompassing intervals. But this implies that if God existed temporally prior to creation, then He has in fact endured through a beginningless series of longer and longer intervals. In fact we can even say that such a pre-creation time must be infinite. The past is infinite if and only if there is no first interval of time and time is not circular. Thus, the amorphous time prior to creation would be infinite, even though we cannot compare the lengths of non-nested intervals of it. Thus, all the difficulties of an infinite past return to haunt us.*

What must be done is to dissolve the linear geometrical structure of pre-creation time. One must maintain that prior to creation there literally are no intervals of time at all. There would be no earlier and later, no enduring through successive

intervals, and, hence, no waiting, no temporal becoming. This changeless state would pass away, not successively, but as a whole, at the moment of creation, when metric time begins.

But such a changeless, undifferentiated state looks suspiciously like a state of timelessness! Imagine God existing changelessly alone in a possible world in which He refrains from creation. In such a world, God is reasonably conceived to be timeless. But God, existing alone without creation in the actual world, is no different than He would be in such a possible world, even though in the actual world He becomes temporal by creating. To claim that time would exist without the universe in virtue of the beginning of the world seems to postulate a sort of backward causation: the occurrence of the first event not only causes time to exist with the event, but also before it. But on a dynamic theory of time, such retrocausation is metaphysically impossible, for it amounts to something's being caused by nothing, since at the time of the effect the retro-cause in no sense exists. Apart from backward causation, there seems to be nothing that would produce a time prior to the moment of creation. Time would simply begin with the occurrence of the first event, the act of creation.

It seems, therefore, that it is not only coherent but also plausible that God existing changelessly alone without creation would be timeless and that He enters time at the moment of creation in virtue of His real relation to the temporal universe. The image of God existing temporally prior to creation is just that: a figment of the imagination. Given that time began to exist, the most plausible view of God's relationship to time is that He is timeless without creation and temporal subsequent to creation.

CHECKLIST OF BASIC TERMS AND CONCEPTS

actualizability

aseity

broad logical necessity/possibility

coherence of theism

conceptualism

conventionalist theory of necessity

creation

Divine Ideas

Eternal-Temporal simultaneity relation

eternity

explanatorily prior

"factual" necessity

hyper-dimension

immateriality

incorporeality

intrinsic metric

logical necessity

metaphysical necessity/possibility

metaphysical pluralism

metrically amorphous time

modified Platonism

necessarily existent being

necessity

Perfect Being theology

Platonism

possible worlds semantics

Process theism

propositions

relational view of space

sentences

spacelessness

strict logical necessity/possibility

substantival view of space

NOTES

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