

Timelessness and Creation

William Lane Craig

SUMMARY

Brian Leftow argues that a temporal God could not be the creator of time and that therefore God should be conceived as timeless. Leftow's first argument, that there is no time at which a temporal God could act to create time fails because God could act at any time t to create t or, alternatively, could act at t in such a way as to be responsible for time existing prior to t . Leftow's second argument, that a temporal God could not have decided at any time t whether time should have a beginning or not fails because Leftow erroneously presupposes that in order for God to be responsible for time's topological properties, there must have been a time at which He made such a decision.

TIMELESSNESS AND CREATION

One of the principal themes in Brian Leftow's extensive case for divine timelessness is that a temporal God cannot be the Creator of time and the universe. Therefore, since such an attenuated concept of deity is unacceptable, we should conceive of God as timeless. In support of the claim that a temporal God cannot be a full-fledged Creator, Leftow presents three arguments. Let us examine each in turn.

Timelessness and the Creation of Time

Leftow reasons that if God is essentially temporal, then His creating time would involve His making His own existence possible because time would be "an absolutely necessary precondition of God's own existence." [1] But it is absurd to talk of something's making itself possible. Therefore, a temporal God cannot create time, which impugns His being the source of all that is other than Himself.

I have elsewhere criticized Leftow's claim that if God is temporal, He is so essentially. [2] Fortunately, Leftow frees his argument from this false premiss by arguing that even if God is contingently temporal, He still cannot act to create time. "To create time," explains Leftow, "is to account for the fact that the set of times has members." [3] But then if every divine action occurs at a time, God cannot act at any moment of time t to bring it about that the set of times has members. God cannot act at t to create times prior to t , since there is no causal power over the past. He cannot create t at t , for His action presupposes His existence, and the existence of t is a precondition of His existence. He can at t only create times later than t , but then the existence of t is unaccounted for. So no matter what point of time one picks, there is no action of God at that time which can account for the fact that the set of times has members.

Is none of these alternatives possible? And are they exhaustive? Let us examine them in reverse order.

Alternative (iii): At t God creates times later than t . God's creating every time t at a time $t^* < t$ might appear to involve an infinite past, which some of us might find objectionable; but if the t_i are instants or unequal intervals of time, this is not necessarily the case, since the series of times could form a convergent series tending toward $t=0$ as the conceptual limit. Although time would be metrically finite, for any time t there would be a time $t^* < t$ at which God acts to bring about the existence of t . The crucial question concerning such a regress of times is not its (metrical) infinity, but whether it is vicious or benign with respect to God's creation of time. Leftow considers it a vicious regress, since at any t at which God acts to create all $t > t$ the existence of t itself is unaccounted for. He concludes, "no action of God located at any time can account for the existence of all times." [4] But why demand that God's action at any time should be able to account for the existence of *all* times? Surely no one would expect God's action at a time to account for the existence of past times! Why should God's creative action at a time account for the existence of anything other than the object of that action at that time? Leftow says, "If this is so, at every time, the set of times has members independent of God's action" [5]--but he should add "at that time." The events at any time are not independent of God's action *überhaupt*. Leftow concludes, "So at every time it is false that God's action at that time accounts for the fact that the set of times has members." [6] But surely it does: God's action at t ensures that there will be a time $t > t$ and, hence, that the set of times is not the empty set, thereby meeting Leftow's conditions for the creation of time. What God's action at t does not account for is that the set of times has *all* the members it does; but there is no reason to expect that it should. No time ever comes to exist but for the fact that God created it, which suffices, it seems, for God's creating time. So I do not find Leftow's reservations about the third alternative persuasive.

My own misgivings about this alternative would instead focus on the notion of existential causation. [7] It seems very strange to hold that the effect of God's creative action at t is delayed until $t > t$, rather than occurring at t itself. If God's causing the existence of times were to cease at t , then on this alternative time would continue on through t without any creative action of God during t . If it is said that God creates t at t , but conserves t in being during t , then I do not see the necessity of any creative act of God at t ; it seems to contribute nothing to the existence of t , which might as well be a first instant of time. In short, the nature of existential causation would seem to require Leftow's second alternative: that God creates t at t itself.

Alternative (ii): God creates t at t . Leftow objects to this second alternative because it allegedly involves a sort of causal or explanatory circle. But does it? Leftow believes that if God is necessarily temporal then "time is an absolutely necessary precondition of God's own existence." [8] But while time's existence would *ex hypothesi* be a necessary condition of God's existence in a strictly logical sense, it need not be a metaphysical "precondition" of God's existence, since God's existence is explanatorily prior, indeed, on a Newtonian account of God and time, [9] causally prior, to time's existence. The only

reason time exists necessarily is because God exists necessarily. Similarly, if abstract objects necessarily exist, they do so only because God necessarily exists. [10] In either case, one might object to the use of "create" in characterizing the causal relation God sustains to His effects, since creation typically is taken to imply free agency, whereas the causation of abstract objects or Newtonian time is, so to speak, automatic. For Newton God's just existing causes time and space to be. But God remains in such cases the source of all reality other than Himself, even if He cannot properly be said to "create" them.

Leftow also charges that if God is contingently temporal, He cannot at t create t because His action at t presupposes t 's existence: t 's existence is explanatorily prior to God's action at t . But on some sort of relational theory of time, such as Leibniz advocated, [11] time is logically posterior to the occurrence of some event. So on a relational theory, God's acting is explanatorily prior to the existence of time. All God has to do is act and time is generated as a consequence. Thus, one could draft a model of divine eternity which combined both Newton's and Leibniz's insights: metaphysical time is founded in God; not, however, in His being, but in His successive activity. Against such a view Leftow's argument that God's creation of t is explanatorily posterior to t 's existence is unavailing.

Alternative (i): At t God creates times prior to t . Finally, what about the first alternative, that at t God creates times prior to t ? I agree with Leftow that no one has causal power over the past. [12] But readers familiar with the literature on divine foreknowledge of future contingents will know that many philosophers affirm a non-causal power over the past, as when we act to bring it about that a future-tense statement or proposition about our action was true or even to bring it about that God had a certain belief in the past about our action. [13] Others affirm a weaker, but nonetheless very important sort of power, namely, the ability to act in such a way that were we to do so, the past would have been different. [14] These future-infected past facts are typically called "soft facts" about the past. Now if these philosophers are correct--and it seems that they are [15]--in asserting some such power, then a bizarre but intriguing possibility arises with respect to God's creation of time, namely: could God's past temporality be a soft fact? That is to say, could it be the case that just as God's having possessed a certain belief concerning future contingents and even having wrought in human history certain events in anticipation of that future contingent are soft facts concerning God which are not temporally necessary until the foreknown event transpires, so God's having existed temporally from eternity past is a soft fact about God which does not become temporally necessary until God causes the first event, say, the beginning of the universe? Having existed changelessly until the first event occurs, God, were He at that point to refrain from causing any events, would not have existed from eternity, but instead be timeless, just as He would not have had a certain belief or caused certain events were the foreknown future contingent not to transpire. Thus, if t is the time of the first event, God has at t either the power to bring it about that He has never been temporal or at least the power to act in such a way that were He

to do so, He would never have been temporal. By creating a first event at t , God either brings it about that there is time prior to t or at least acts in such a way that, His having so acted, there is time prior to t . That is somewhat akin to creating at t time(s) prior to t , even if it falls short of a robust causal account of creation. Though strange, this alternative, which Leftow does not consider, is not obviously absurd and deserves further exploration and reflection.

Thus, it seems to me that Leftow has not successfully excluded any of the three alternatives mentioned, though the second seems the most plausible of the candidates.

Finally, it needs to be asked whether there is not a fourth alternative, to wit, an Ockhamist-inspired model of God's existing timelessly *sans* creation and out of that timeless eternity creating t , by which very act God takes on a temporal mode of existence. [16] The presupposition of the first alternative is that there cannot be a first moment of time in God's life, that by creating a first event, God acts in such a way that it entails the existence of time prior to the time of the first event. But the Ockhamist sees no necessity of such a presupposition; by creating a first event God creates a first moment of time, and to imagine any time prior to creation is just that: imagination. God's creation of t out of timeless eternity would circumvent Leftow's problem that God's creation of t logically presupposes the existence of t . As Leftow himself observes, "Suppose that God *could have* acted from beyond time. If He had, His creation of t from beyond time would not presuppose His existing at t ." [17]

Nevertheless, I think that we should question the coherence of this alternative. Suppose someone asserts that we should reject this alternative for the same reason that I rejected the third, namely, it seems inexplicable why there should be, so to speak, a delay between God's creative action and the effect of that action. [18] If God causes something in timeless eternity, then the effect should exist in timeless eternity; the effect should exist co-eternally with God. On a tensed theory of time, it seems metaphysically impossible that God should be timelessly causing an event and yet that event not co-exist with God in eternity, but spring into being at a moment of time in the finite past. God's creating a first event is itself an event which brings God into time. But then the question arises, when does this creative act occur? The answer can only be: simultaneously with the first event. Thus, we are back to the second alternative. If, on the other hand, we adopt a tenseless theory of time, which permits God's timeless causation of a temporal event, then we shall reject the Ockhamist claim that so acting would temporalize God. Rather this would be a *bona fide* case of God's timelessly creating every t . Therefore, on either theory of time this alternative collapses into another view and so is incoherent.

In summary, then, even if we reject the first, third, and fourth alternatives, nevertheless, the second alternative remains plausible, which dissolves Leftow's trilemma.

Timelessness and the Creation of the Universe

Leftow's next argument piggy-backs on the foregoing and can be dealt with summarily. He argues that in order for God to create the whole universe of temporal things, He must also create time. But a temporal God cannot create time. So if God can create the universe, He is timeless.

In this argument we find not only the erroneous premiss that a temporal God cannot create time, but also an unacceptably reductionistic conception of time, [19] in that Leftow equates "the entire universe of temporal things" with physical space-time and its denizens. Once we free ourselves of that reductionism, there is no reason why God could not exist in a sort of metaphysical time prior to the inception of physical time (and space). Such a time could be conceived substantively along Newtonian lines or relationally as the concomitant of either changes in God or in His effects (say, God's creating angelic realms prior to His creation of physical space-time). Thus, even if it were true that a temporal God could not create time, He could still create the universe.

Timelessness and the Beginning of Time

Leftow's third argument is reminiscent of the first. If God is temporal, then it cannot have been up to God whether time had a beginning, for there cannot have been a time at which God made a choice that is responsible for time's having had no beginning. Suppose that t is such a time. If t was preceded by infinite time, then its existence is not up to God unless we credit Him with power to effect the past, which seems impossible. If t was preceded by a finite period of time, then time already has a beginning, and it is too late for God to wipe it out and replace it with an infinite past. If t is the first moment of time, then in order for God to choose that time be beginningless He must either annihilate t , so that the temporal series lacks a beginning point, or He must cause moments of time to exist prior to t . But God cannot act at t to annihilate t , for if t were annihilated it would be false that God acts at t . And neither can God act at t to bring it about that there were moments of time before t , since there is no such power over the past. Thus, a temporal God cannot be responsible for time's having had no beginning. But if God is not responsible for time's having had no beginning neither can He be responsible for time's having had a beginning, should that be the case. For in the first place, if it is not up to an agent whether p is true, then it is not up to him whether not- p is true. Secondly, only at the first moment of time could God effect it that time have a first moment. But if God is temporal, His existence and action at time's first moment presuppose the existence of that moment and so cannot account for that moment's existence. In sum, a temporal God cannot be responsible for time's having or lacking a beginning. Since a timeless God can be so responsible, an atemporal deity is more perfect than a temporal deity, and so God should be regarded as timeless.

Leftow's complex argument rests on the presupposition that in order for it to be up to God whether time had a beginning or not, there must have been "a *time* at which God makes a choice" for one of these options. [20] But it seems to me that this assumption is false. For in virtue of His omniscience, God's

choices are not events, since He neither deliberates temporally nor does His will move from a state of indecision to decision. He simply has free determinations of the will to execute certain actions, and any deliberation can only be said to be explanatorily, not temporally, prior to His decrees. [21] If time is essential to choosing, then a timeless God could not choose between a beginningless or a finite time either. The key question, then, is whether it can be up to God whether time is finite or infinite, not whether there can be a time of His choice. So let us inquire whether God can act at t in such a way as to be responsible that past time is infinite.

Consider Leftow's three alternatives in order. *Alternative (i): t was preceded by infinite time.* Leftow simply waves aside the possibility of God's having power over the past, but we have seen that this assumption may be too quick. If God is changeless prior to t , such that t is the time of the first event, then it is not obvious that God's having had an infinite past prior to t , whether in metric time or non-metric time, cannot be a soft fact about God. For since there were no events prior to t , the only reason that time could be said to exist prior to t is that God existed literally before t . Had God refrained from acting at t , there would have been no time at all. Thus, by acting at t God either non-causally brings it about that time existed prior to t or else He acts in such a way that by His acting in that way, time existed prior to t . God has existed changelessly from eternity with a free determination to create t , and time before t is a soft fact contingent upon God's acting to create t . If the time prior to t is geometrically amorphous, then in a sense it is neither infinite nor finite, since there is no objective fact of the matter whether that whole time is greater than, equal to, or less than the moment t itself. But the prior non-metric time would be beginningless and in that sense not finite. This alternative may be strange, but it is not evidently incoherent and merits further investigation.

Alternative (ii): t was preceded by finite time. In saying that God would need to erase the finite past at t and replace it with an infinite past, Leftow seems to be envisioning the logically impossible task of changing the past. Of course God cannot do that, but this constitutes no restriction on what is within His power. The real question is whether God is able at t to bring it about that although the past is finite, it would have been infinite. This seems to me dubious. Even in the cases of soft facts about the past, God is not held to be able at t to bring it about that a past event e at $t^* < t$ did not occur. Rather the idea is that God, in virtue of His foreknowledge, brought about e when t^* was present; but had God foreknown other future contingents would transpire, He would not have brought about e when t^* was present. When those foreknown events themselves are transpiring or about to transpire at t , the agents involved have the ability to effect different events at t than those which they do. But were they to choose differently at t , God would have foreknown this and so not brought about e when t^* was present. It is not the case that at t God would somehow act to bring it about that He had not caused e at t^* or never foreknown the events at t . Yet alternative (ii) seems to envision precisely this latter sort of ability. Since t is preceded by finite time, that time is not the consequence of t 's being the time of the first event (otherwise it would

be infinite or amorphous, since if t 's elapsing is itself sufficient that there should have been n finite time units prior to t , it would also be sufficient for there having been $n+1$ finite time units prior to t). So the times prior to t must be either substantial time units in their own right or the relational consequences of events going on prior to t . Thus, if God refrained from creating t , that would have no intrinsic effect on times prior to t ; they would still have existed, only now they would be at the end of time. Thus, it is difficult to see how God could do anything at t to bring it about that time was infinite when it was in fact finite.

But could He achieve this indirectly? For example, just as God would not bring about e when t^* was present were the agents responsible for the future contingent events at t to act other than as they will, so perhaps God would not have brought about a finite past at $t=0$, but an infinite past instead, had He foreknown that He would act differently than He will at t . Thus, by acting differently at t God could indirectly bring it about that the past had always been infinite. This scenario, however, is problematic. For if God were to act differently than He will at t , there would still be no time in the past at which He could, as a result of His foreknowledge of His act at t , act to create an infinite past. Given that any t has predecessors $t_i < t$, such action would require backward causation, which we have dismissed as impossible. Therefore, such a decree cannot be based on divine foreknowledge; it must be explanatorily prior to His foreknowledge. That is to say, the decree that the past should be infinite would have to be based on God's middle knowledge of what He would do if He were to act in a certain way at t . Knowing how He would act in the circumstances at t , God decrees a finite past; but were He to act differently at t , His middle knowledge would have been different and He would have decreed an infinite past instead. The problem, however, with this scenario is that God cannot, it seems, have middle knowledge of His own free acts. [22] Therefore, He cannot act at t so as even indirectly to bring about an infinite past. Therefore, I concur with Leftow that the second alternative seems untenable.

Alternative (iii): t is the first moment of time. Consider Leftow's two sub-alternatives: (a) *God could annihilate t.* Here Leftow relies on his argument, which we have already rejected, that t 's existence is logically or explanatorily prior to God's action. Leftow contends that God's annihilating t is logically posterior to t 's existence. But a less misleading statement of this alternative would be that God simply refrains from creating t , which does not presuppose t 's existence. As we have seen, it can be plausibly maintained that had God refrained from creating t He would have been either timeless or non-metrically temporal. If t does exist, God is able at t to refrain from creating t . Leftow confuses this claim with the false claim that God is able to refrain at t from creating t . [23] This latter claim is necessarily false because if God were to refrain at t from creating t , t would exist as the time of God's refraining. But no such incoherence exists in the assertion that God is able at t so to act that, were He to act in that way, t would not have existed. [24]

Nevertheless, I do not think that the success of sub-alternative (a) goes to support the third alternative,

that at the first moment of time God could have created a beginningless time. Leftow is operating with a faulty notion of what it means for time to begin to exist. In holding that a temporal series lacking a first temporal instant does not begin to exist, Leftow assumes that beginning to exist entails having a beginning *point*. But this seems quite wrong: would we say that a concert did not begin because it lacked an initial, durationless instant? Rather time begins to exist if and only if for some finite interval of time there are only a finite number of equal intervals earlier than that time. Or again, time begins to exist if and only if there is a finite interval of time which is not preceded by an interval of equal temporal extension. [25] Whether time has a first instant is incidental to time's having begun to exist.

Now consider sub-alternative (b): *God causes moments prior to t*. Since *ex hypothesi* *t* is the first moment of time, we have ruled out the model of God's existing prior to His creation of *t*. Whether it makes sense to say that God is able at *t* to bring it about that moments earlier than *t* would have existed before *t* will depend upon whether one adopts a certain version of the relational theory of time. God is plausibly able at *t* to create different events than those He in fact creates at *t*, such that the events at *t* should come later in the series of events rather than first. But on a relational view of time which identifies moments of time with certain classes of events, [26] it follows from God's ability at *t* to create events which would precede the events constituting *t* that God is able at *t* to create moments of time prior to *t*. Again, this claim should not be confused with the assertion that God is able to create at *t* moments of time prior to *t*. The latter ability would imply retro-causation; the former implies merely that at *t* God is able to do something other than what He is in fact doing. Now if God is able at *t* to create different events and, hence, times prior to *t*, then, if an infinite series of past events is possible, there seems no reason to deny that God is able at *t* to create an infinite number of events prior to *t*, so that time would be beginningless. [27] Now perhaps such a version of the relational theory of time is untenable; but pending some discussion of it we are forced to regard Leftow's refutation of the third alternative as inconclusive. Therefore, it seems to me, having failed to refute (i) and (iii. b), Leftow has not shown that a temporal God cannot be responsible for there having been an infinite time.

What, then, about His responsibility for time's having been finite? With respect to Leftow's first argument, Leftow appears to reason that since it was not up to God whether time was beginningless, then it is not up to God whether time had a beginning. What Leftow means to say here is that since it is not up to God that time, if it exists, is beginningless, it is not up to God that time, if it exists, has a beginning. For, even if his arguments had been successful, he would not have shown that it is not up to God whether time was beginningless. God could simply have refrained from creating time at all and thus, even though He would not be responsible for determining time's topology, it would still be up to Him whether a beginningless time exists. Similarly, it would still be up to God whether time had a beginning, if it does, even if its topology is outside His control. In any case, we have not seen any good reason to think that God cannot be responsible for the topological fact that time, if it exists, is

beginningless, and we have yet to see a reason to think that it is not up to God whether time, if it exists, has a beginning. Leftow's second argument against God's being responsible for the fact that time, if it exists, has a beginning merely reiterates the false contention that God's acting at t is logically posterior to t . Hence, I do not think we have sound reasons for thinking a temporal God cannot be responsible for time's topological feature of having a beginning or not. Whether a timeless God can be so responsible is a moot question which will probably depend on whether one adopts a tensed or tenseless theory of time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have not seen any good reasons to think that a temporal deity could not be the Creator of time and the universe.

Footnotes:

[1]

Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 273

[2]

William Lane Craig, "Timelessness and Necessary Existence," *International Philosophical Quarterly* (under consideration).

[3]

Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 273.

[4]

Ibid., p. 274.

[5]

Ibid.

[6]

Ibid.

[7]

For background discussion see James F. Ross, "Creation," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 614-629; idem, "Creation II," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. A.J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 115-141; Philip Quinn, "Creation, Conservation, and the Big Bang," in *Philosophical Problems of the Internal and External Worlds*, ed. John Earman, *et. al.* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. .

Relevant in this connection are the arguments of those who contend that temporal causes necessarily precede their effects chronologically. Le Poidevin, for example, asserts a Principle of Reciprocity R which states that necessarily, if A at t causes B 's beginning to be G at t' , then A is F at t and not- F at t^* such that $t < t^* < t'$. This precludes $t=t'$. Imagining A and B to be two billiard balls, Le Poidevin observes that at the instant when A strikes B , if all A 's momentum were conserved, then B would not move; but if momentum is communicated to B , then at that instant A has lost some. Hence, A 's causing B to move must precede temporally B 's beginning to move (Robin Le Poidevin, *Change, Cause, and Contradiction: A Defense of the Tenseless Theory of Time*, Macmillan Studies in Contemporary Philosophy [London: Macmillan, 1991], p. 88). Le Poidevin extends R to cover static as well as dynamic cases of causal connection and elevates R to a logically, not merely physically, necessary truth, so that it would require God to create t at $t < t'$. Even on a physical level, however, it seems to me that R is false. For if there is a time t^* between t and t' when A is not F , then why does B begin to be G at t' ? A 's momentum is already spent by that time. So where does B 's newly found momentum at t' come from? A at t' --then how did it jump across the temporal gap from t to t' ? During the interval containing t^* neither A nor B possesses it, which seems absurd. If R fails even on the physical level, how much more implausible is it on a metaphysical level governing God's creative relation to the world, where no conservation laws are involved! The erroneous presupposition of R is that simultaneous causation is to be construed as occurring at an instant, rather than at a moment (of arbitrarily short non-zero duration).

[\[8\]](#)

Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 273.

[\[9\]](#)

In Newton's view, time (like space) is an emanative effect of God's being. He explains,

"No being exists or can exist which is not related to space in some way. God is everywhere, created minds are somewhere, and body is in the space that it occupies; and whatever is neither everywhere nor anywhere does not exist. And hence it follows that space is an [emanative] effect arising from the first existence of being, because when any being is postulated, space is postulated. And the same may be asserted of duration: for certainly both are dispositions of being or attributes according to which we

denominate quantitatively the presence and duration of any existing individual thing. So the quantity of the existence of God was eternal, in relation to duration, and infinite in relation to the space in which he is present; and the quantity of the existence of a created thing was as great, in relation to duration, as the duration since the beginning of its existence, and in relation to the size of its presence as great as the space belonging to it" (Isaac Newton, "On the Gravity and Equilibrium of Fluids," in *Unpublished Scientific Papers of Isaac Newton*, ed. and trans. A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962], pp. 136-37).

Hall and Hall's translation of the phrase *entis primario existentis effectus emanativus* conceals the bracketed word I have inserted in the text. Space and time are not voluntary creations of God, but, as it were, displacements in being resulting from His existence.

[\[10\]](#)

See Thomas V. Morris and Christopher Menzel, "Absolute Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986): 353-362.

[\[11\]](#)

On Leibniz's view, time is an order of succession among events. Thus,

"If there no creatures, there could be neither time nor place, and consequently no actual space. The immensity of God is independent upon space, as his eternity is independent upon time. These attributes signify only [with regard to these two orders of things] that God would be present and co-existent with all the things that should exist. And therefore I don't admit what's here alleged, that if God existed alone there would be time and space as there is now: whereas then, in my opinion, they would be only in the ideas of God as mere possibilities" (G. W. Leibniz, "Mr. Leibniz's Fifth Paper," in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by H. G. Alexander [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956], p. 80).

Leibniz presupposes God's changelessness. But were God to act or even think discursively, time would spring into existence as a concomitant.

[\[12\]](#)

See William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), pp. 150-156.

[\[13\]](#)

See, e.g., respectively Alfred J. Freddoso, "Accidental Necessity and Power over the Past," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (1982): 54-68; George I. Mavrodes, "Is the Past Unpreventable?" *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 131-146.

[14]

E.g., Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 235-269.

[15]

See Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, pp. 186-203. Leftow objects to the Molinist solution because it accords us power to effect events only in a Pickwickian sense. For Molinist freedom is compatible with its being the case that for all propositions p and q that $p \rightarrow q$; that q is false; that were a person S going to effect it that p , then q would have been true; and that S has no power to effect it that q . But, Leftow objects, in that case S does not actually have the power to effect it that p , for q 's falsity prevents this. But this latter allegation is made by Leftow without justification and is therefore question-begging. I should say that if $p =$ "I shall mow the lawn Saturday" and $q =$ "God knows that I shall mow the lawn Saturday," then I do have the power to effect it that p even if q is false and q 's truth cannot be causally effected by me. As for Ockhamism, Leftow just asserts that God's past beliefs are hard facts, which is begging the question. On the most sophisticated analyses of temporal necessity to date, God's beliefs turn out to be soft facts.

Moreover, the defender of timelessness who rejects Ockhamist/Molinist solutions on the basis of the temporal necessity of propositions concerning God's past beliefs seem to find themselves hoist on their own petard, since a timelessly obtaining state of affairs seems as hard and unalterable a fact as facts about the past. The comparison of eternity to the present only reinforces the point since the present seems as realized and fixed as the past. Leftow himself endorses the dictum "What is, when it is, is fixedly," commenting, "If a fact is already established and present, it is too late to prevent its obtaining. For us it is as fixed and unalterable as the past, it can no longer be affected" (Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 87). Leftow goes on to connect maximal fixity and presence with immutability and timelessness. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that God's timeless beliefs about what events are present to Him in eternity are as hard and fixed as any event of the past. If we have the power to effect it that, or to act in such a way that, were we to act in that way, timelessly false propositions about God's beliefs would have been timelessly true instead, I do not see why similar power is objectionable with regard to past-tense propositions about God's beliefs.

[16]

Such a model has been dubbed "accidental temporalism" by Thomas D. Senior, "Divine Temporality and

Creation *ex Nihilo*," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 86-92. For discussion see Craig, "Timelessness and Necessary Existence."

[\[17\]](#)

Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 274. Cf. "If . . . that moment's existence presupposes God's existence, then God exists 'logically before' that moment does. If so, God in effect makes 'outside' time His choice that that moment exist--in which case He is intrinsically timeless" (*Ibid.*, p. 277).

[\[18\]](#)

See Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), pp. 20-21, 71-73.

[\[19\]](#)

See the discussion in William Lane Craig, "The Special Theory of Relativity and Theories of Divine Eternity," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994): 23-26; *idem*, "Timelessness and Necessary Existence."

[\[20\]](#)

Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, p. 275 [my emphasis].

[\[21\]](#)

See discussion of divine deliberation and middle knowledge in Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, pp. 223-225.

[\[22\]](#)

See William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*, *Studies in Intellectual History* 7 (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1988), pp. 275-278; *idem*, *Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, pp. 179-183, 229-232.

[\[23\]](#)

Perhaps part of the confusion here arises from assimilating temporal necessity/possibility with the possible worlds semantics for broadly logical necessity/possibility. When it is said that it is possible at t for God to act in a certain way, this does not mean that if t were actual then it would be true that God acts in a certain way. Then nothing but what actually happens would be possible. Rather what is meant is that when t is present it is still within God's power to act in a certain way. So when it is

asserted that God is able at t to refrain from creating t , this should not be construed to mean that there is some t at which God refrains from creating it, but that even as God is creating t , it is still within God's power not to create t , of course, were He to refrain, t would not exist.

[\[24\]](#)

It might be objected by partisans of temporal necessity that it is not within God's power at t to refrain from what He is actually doing at t . One recalls Aristotle's dictum: "Everything that is, is necessarily, when it is." In some accounts of temporal necessity, such as Freddoso's, only past-tense propositions can be necessary, so that even though God is acting at t to create t God is able at t to refrain from creating t . Still it must be admitted that it is difficult to see any difference in the actuality of the past and present; both seem equally real, so that it is hard to justify why the present is not characterized by the same necessity that purportedly characterizes the past. Such an objection can be circumvented, however, by maintaining that God *sans* creation in a timeless state could have refrained from creating t , even if at t He did not have the power to refrain. For the advocate of unqualified timelessness, on the other hand, the objection makes fatalism go through with a vengeance, for even though God's actions are timeless, still they are actual, instantiated in reality, and therefore God cannot refrain from what He is actually (tenselessly) doing.

[\[25\]](#)

See Quentin Smith, "On the Beginning of Time," *Nous* 19 (1985): 579. Technically this characterization applies to metric time.

[\[26\]](#)

See, e.g., Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1948), p. 275; for discussion see Quentin Smith, "The New Theory of Reference Entails Absolute Time and Space," *Philosophy of Science* 58 (1991): 411-416.

[\[27\]](#)

The choice to create a beginningless series could not be taken at t , of course; the divine decision is logically prior to God's carrying out that decision and occurs at no time. God would just always be carrying out His logically prior decision by creating times. What makes this scenario puzzling is that we want to know where in the infinite series God would be, *i.e.*, what moment would be present for Him, were He to be creating a beginningless time, and this seems arbitrary. It is tempting to place Him at the infinitely distant beginning of time on analogy with His actual location at t , but no such moment need exist. It must be said that God's location in beginningless time is perhaps no more arbitrary than His

location in any arbitrarily long finite series He could create prior to t . For if, instead of creating t as the first moment of time, God were to create a world beginning at $t^* < t$, where would God be: at t^* ? At t ? In between at $t^* < t' < t$? Do we preserve God's location at t or at the beginning of time? I do not know how to assess the weight of such worlds' similarities to the actual world to answer such a question.