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Timelessness

Emily Pemberton

Abstract

God's temporality is still debated today by theologians and philosophers with whether God is temporal, atemporal, or some other form of temporality. The context of this paper is the topic of God's timelessness with the idea of William Lane Craig's idea of "omnitemporality." The paper discusses a few of the major arguments for God's temporality and also God's timelessness. The paper then analyzes Craig's article defending the omnitemporality of God declaring that God is non-temporal without creation and then becomes temporal with creation. Though this idea may seem as a possible solution to the question of God's temporality, it fails to follow with the Kalam argument and the relationship of time and change, for any possibility of change requires some duration of time.

Introduction

There are many attributes that people ascribe to a supreme being; the attribute of timelessness is one of them. Temporality is understood as the mode of existence of an object that is in time.¹ Many philosophers have debated the issue of God's timelessness and temporality, whether he is temporal, non-temporal, or some other possible form. Recently, William Lane Craig has published a paper where he defends the idea that God is "omnitemporal": God is able to change from non-temporality to temporality in the creation of time. However, with the attribute of timelessness, the idea that God is non-temporal without creation and temporal with creation fails to adhere to the Kalam cosmological argument and the relationship between time and change.

Analysis

In the article "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," William Lane Craig defends the idea that God is non-temporal without creation and temporal since creation. He begins his argument with the explanation of divine timelessness. One of the most important arguments that supports divine timelessness is the claim

¹ Garrett DeWeese, "Atemporal, Sempiternal, or Omnitemporal: God's Temporal Mode of Being," in *God and Time Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press 2002), 50.

that the fleeting nature of a temporal life is incompatible with the life of a most perfect being.² The argument for this claim is as follows:

1. God is the most perfect being.
2. The most perfect being has the most perfect mode of existence.
3. Temporal existence is a less perfect mode of existence than a timeless existence.
4. Therefore God has the most perfect mode of existence
5. Therefore God has a timeless mode of existence.³

The premises of this argument rely on the notion of the loss that comes through the experience of temporal passage. In another paper by Craig entitled "The Elimination of Absolute Time by the Special Theory of Relativity," Craig states that whether an individual believes that God exists temporally or atemporally is apt to depend on whether the individual believes that time is dynamic or static.⁴ The dynamic view of time, which is referred to as "A-theory," defends that time flow is objectively real. The static view of time, referred to as "B-theory," implies that the flow of time is an illusion; the present does not move, but time is merely subjective.⁵ Craig explains that some philosophers argue for the static or tenseless

² Craig, William Lane. "Timelessness & Omnitemporality." in *God & Time Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 2001), 132.

³ Ibid. 133.

⁴ Craig, William Lane. "The Elimination of Absolute Time by the Special Theory of Relativity." in *God and Time Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press 2002), 132.

⁵ "Time." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed April 11, 2015.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/time/>.

view of time, according to which the past and future are just as real as the present, and the passing of time is explained as a subjective illusion of human consciousness. With this view of “tenseless,” a temporal God would exist at all temporal locations without beginning or end to his temporal extension. Though this view may seem plausible, it fails to appreciate that it is based on the experience of temporal passage rather than the objective reality of temporal passage itself.⁶ The fact remains with a temporal being: the past is lost and the future is not accessible to the temporal being.

After the brief discussion of divine timelessness, Craig begins to explain the arguments for divine temporality. One of the arguments is that since the Christian God is a personal being, God must be a temporal being in order to be a person, for it is argued that a person must have certain properties that inherently involve time⁷.

Another argument concerns the divine relations with the world. This argument is summarized as follows:

1. God is creatively active in the temporal world.
2. If God is creatively active in the temporal world, God is really related to the temporal world.
3. If God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal.

⁶ Craig, William Lane. "Timelessness & Omnitemporality." in *God & Time Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 2001), 134.

⁷ Ibid. 137.

4. Therefore God is temporal.⁸

This argument initiates a standard belief that in order for God to relate to the temporal world, then God must undergo extrinsic change. To explain this further, at the first moment of time God would be in a new relation in which He would not have been before (since there was no “before”). In the creation of time, God would undergo an extrinsic change because He comes into the relation of sustaining the universe or possibly coexisting with the universe, which relations had not existed before.⁹ Lastly, Craig argues for a third argument for divine temporality from divine knowledge of tensed facts. It is argued by some that a timeless God cannot know certain tensed facts about the world (for example, what is happening now) and therefore, since God is omniscient, He must be temporal.¹⁰ Tensed facts are defined with the function to locate something in relation to the present.¹¹

This argument is summarized as follows:

1. A temporal world exists.
2. God is omniscient.
3. If a temporal world exists, then God is omniscient, God knows tensed facts.

⁸ Craig, William Lane. "Timelessness & Omnitemporality." in *God & Time Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 2001) 141.

⁹ Ibid. 140-141.

¹⁰ Ibid. 145.

¹¹ Ibid. 145.

4. If God is timeless, He does not know tensed facts.

5. Therefore, God is not timeless.¹²

Both of the arguments for divine timelessness and divine temporality are strong and are still debated today by many philosophers such as Alan Padgett, Garrett DeWeese, Brian Leftow, and Delmas Lewis. These arguments show the difficulty in the attempt to describe God's relation to time, whether He is temporal or non-temporal.

After explaining the two sides of this debate, Craig defends his notion of "omnitemporality." Several statements are declared: first, that God exists in time; second, time had a beginning; and third, God did not have a beginning.¹³ It is difficult to merge these statements, for if time began to exist, then God must have existed beyond the beginning of time. God must therefore have been changeless in that state, for change requires time. Furthermore, this state cannot exist before the creation of time in a temporal sense. God must be causally, but not temporally, before the creation of the universe and time. When God created the universe, God entered into time at the moment of creation in virtue of His real relations with the created order. Thus Craig concludes that God must be timeless

¹² Craig, William Lane. "Timelessness & Omnitemporality." in *God & Time Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 2001) 145.

¹³ Ibid. 156.

without the universe and temporal with the universe.¹⁴ As God exists without creation, there are no temporal states such as *before*, or *after*, or any temporal passage or future phase: there is just God.¹⁵ However, to state that time exists before the beginning of the world (a “timeless” phase before the creation of time) constitutes a problem with a backward causation (which has an effect occurring before its cause) for the occurrence of the first event causes time to exist not only with the event but also before it.¹⁶ Craig uses an analogy of the possible creation of the universe by the Big Bang and how it is not considered to be part of time but to constitute a boundary to time, but it is considered to be causally connected to the universe. By following this analogy, Craig offers the idea that God’s timeless eternity is a boundary of time that is causally, but not temporally prior to the creation of the universe.¹⁷

Response

All of the previous arguments for the temporality of God make it difficult to determine whether God is in time or is timeless. However, Craig’s argument for God’s omnitemporality with God without time without creation and becomes temporal with creation does not satisfy the debate, for the argument is

¹⁴ Craig, William Lane. "Timelessness & Omnitemporality." in *God & Time Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 2001) 156.

¹⁵ Ibid 156.

¹⁶ Ibid. 159.

¹⁷ Ibid. 160.

inconsistent. In his article, "God, Time and the Kalam Cosmological Argument" Christopher Bobier argues that Craig must either abandon his view of God's relationship to time or the Kalam argument. William Lane Craig presents the Kalam argument as follows:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.¹⁸

In regards to William Lane Craig's idea on God's relationship to time, Wes Morrison defines Craig's view as: "Qua creator of the temporal universe, God is eternal in the sense of 'atemporal.' But now that there is a temporal universe, God exists at every time – past, present, and future."¹⁹ However, Bobier defends that if one affirms both the Kalam Argument and Craig's view on God's omnitemporality, then it follows that either God has a cause or the Kalam Argument is unsound.²⁰

To begin his argument, Bobier starts with premise 1 and tries to discover a satisfactory account of what it means for an object to "begin to exist." However,

¹⁸ Bobier, Christopher Alan. "God, Time and the Kalam Cosmological Argument." *Sophia* Vol. 52, no. 4 (2013): 593-600. Accessed March 6, 2015. 593.

<http://link.springer.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/article/10.1007/s11841-013-0362-4>. 593.

¹⁹ Morrison, Wes. "Must the Beginning of the Universe Have a Personal Cause? A Critical Examination of the Kalam Cosmological Argument." *Faith and Philosophy*, 17(2), 149–169. 151.

²⁰ Bobier, Christopher Alan. "God, Time and the Kalam Cosmological Argument." *Sophia* Vol. 52, no. 4 (2013): 593-600. Accessed March 6, 2015. 594.

with every account that Craig offers there still seems to be the conclusion that either the Kalam Argument is unsound or God has a cause. The first account that was given for the “begins to exist” (BTE) is as follows:

BTE) X begins to exist at t^1 if there is an earlier time immediately prior at which X did not exist.²¹

It is argued that those who affirm the Kalam Argument cannot affirm this first BTE. If this first BTE is true with the universe to begin to exist, then there must be a time “prior” to the creation at which the universe did not exist. But, according to Craig’s view, time was created along with the creation of the universe so there is no time “prior to” the creation. The creation of the universe combined with Craig’s view does not satisfy BTE, and therefore would suggest that the Kalam Argument is unsound.²² In order to resolve these problems, Craig has revised the BTE in order to try to make it conform to the Kalam Argument.

One of his next revisions was BTE² which is as follows:

BTE²) X begins to exist at t^1 if (i) x exists at t^1 and (ii) there is no time prior to t^1 at which x exists.²³

Unfortunately, this version is not effective either for if it were correct, according to Craig’s view, in the creation of the universe God also created time; so define

²¹ Bobier, Christopher Alan. "God, Time and the Kalām Cosmological Argument." *Sophia* Vol. 52, no. 4 (2013): 593-600. Accessed March 6, 2015. 595.

²² *Ibid.* 595.

²³ *Ibid.* 596.

the first moment of time be “ t^1 ” for the rest of this paper. God entered into time at t^1 and thus had a first moment of time. But, since God entered into time at the first moment, there was no earlier time at which God would have existed. Time did not exist prior to t^1 (the first moment of time) and thus God did not exist at any time “prior to” t^1 . Therefore it concludes with BTE² that God begins to exist and according to the first premise of the Kalam Argument, God must have a cause.²⁴ There are a few other accounts for the BTE argument but each has had some aspect of the argument that either has God have a cause or the makes the Kalam Argument unsound. The recent account is BTE⁴ which is as follows:

BTE⁴) X begins to exist at t^1 if (i) x exists at t^1 ; (ii) t is either the first time at which x exists or is separated from any time $t^* < t$ at which x existed by a nondegenerate, temporal interval; (iii) x’s existing at t^1 is a tensed fact.²⁵

Again, if BTE⁴ is true, then it leads to the question of whether God’s existing at t^1 is a tensed fact. When God entered into time, according to Craig, then God experienced a first moment in time: let this be t^1 , and one says that prior to t^1 , God exists timelessly. However, God existing at t^1 is a tensed fact. It is a fact that at t^1 , God exists now. Therefore, with BTE⁴, God exists at t^1 , t^1 is the first time at

²⁴ Bobier, Christopher Alan. "God, Time and the Kalām Cosmological Argument." *Sophia* Vol. 52, no. 4 (2013): 593-600. Accessed March 6, 2015. 596.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 598-599.

which God exists, and his existence at t^1 is a tensed fact.²⁶ So it concludes again, as with all of the BTE accounts, that either God has a cause for his existence or the Kalam Argument is again unsound. Bobier states that an individual who affirms the Kalam Argument precludes the individual from affirming that God is outside of time without creation and temporal with it; for if one affirmed Craig's view of omnitemporality then the person cannot offer the Kalam Argument, for the person will have to undermine the view that God is uncreated.²⁷ In a review of "Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time" Merrit Quarum asks the question of whether God chose to destroy the universe and also time (temporality), would that then make God timeless? With the view of "omnitemporality" that Craig provides, how would he be able to answer this? God's role in creating and possibly submitting Himself into time has significant philosophical and theological implications in regards to God's omnipresent, omniscience, and omnipotence.²⁸

In "God and Time Four Views" Alan G. Padgett responded to William Lane Craig's paper on God's omnitemporality on the argument that if God is timeless before creation then it would be impossible for God to change and

²⁶ Bobier, Christopher Alan. "God, Time and the Kalām Cosmological Argument." *Sophia* Vol. 52, no. 4 (2013): 593-600. Accessed March 6, 2015. 599.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 600.

²⁸ Quarum, Merrit. "Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 4 (12, 2003): 746-9, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/211206278?accountid=12085>. 749.

become temporal with creation. The argument is centered on the idea that for a change to occur, a duration, or interval of time, must also occur. He begins his argument is as follows:

1. Necessarily, if no duration occurs then no change occurs.
2. Necessarily, if a change occurs then duration occurs.
3. If a duration occurs, then it must be the case that a change does not occur (at that time).

Padgett introduced proposition 3 in order to argue it false. Proposition 3 obviously contradicts proposition 2.

So he introduces the final part of the argument:

4. If a duration occurs, then it might be the case that a change occurs.
5. If no duration occurs, then it is not possible for a change to occur.
6. If possibly a change occurs then duration occurs.²⁹

He shows that time is the dimension of the possibility of change. Change does not have to happen in order for time to happen, but the possibility of change follows from time.³⁰ Following from Proposition 5, since it is impossible for change to occur if there is no duration, then it is impossible for a world to be both fully timeless and have the possibility of change to occur. With Padgett's argument, it argues that in Craig's view that God is timeless without creation and then become temporal with creation, that it is impossible for God to change if He is truly

²⁹ Padgett, Alan G. "Response to William Lane Craig." in *God & Time Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 168-169.

³⁰ Ibid. 168.

timeless. Padgett concludes that since God has the possibility of change and has had it even before creation that God is and has been temporal in some sense.³¹

Conclusion

In regards to the question of the temporality of God, there are various evidences used in the arguments for the different possible temporalities of God. The philosophical arguments debate the temporality of God with the premises of God's perfect mode of existence, the relationship to the temporal world, and also God's omniscience. At first it seems that William Lane Craig's hybrid view of God's relationship to time, that of "omnitemporality" may hold possible answers to the long debate of the temporality of God. However, with Craig's argument for God's "omnitemporality," there seems to be enough evidence to support the view that it is inconsistent in that it does not correspond to the Kalam Argument nor to the relationship between time, or duration, and the possibility of change.

³¹ Ibid. 169.

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