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BOOK REVIEWS

God, Time and Eternity, by **William Lane Craig**. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001. Pp. xi, 321. \$105.00 (cloth).

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In the preface to this wide-ranging and impressive study, William Lane Craig wonders whether the many other recent works on God's relation to time have left him with anything to say (x). Evidently undaunted, he proceeds over the course of 284 pages to examine the issue from a variety of perspectives, including biblical interpretation, the tensed and tenseless theories of time, the special and general theories of relativity, and contemporary cosmology. And in each of these areas he succeeds in finding something very interesting to say. Craig offers, along with incisive critical analysis covering much of the large body of recent philosophical literature, a scientifically informed defense of his own 'Ockhamist' conception of God's temporal status. This view is that God has been temporal since the creation of time and the universe at the Big Bang, but is atemporal *sans* (one mustn't say 'before') creation. Since creation, God's time is (or coincides with) the 'cosmic time' of the expanding universe, while *sans* creation God exists in a solitary, timeless, and changeless (but not immutable) state.

The book has two parts. Part I ('The Nature of Divine Eternity') is a critical survey of arguments for and against the timelessness of God. In the first chapter, after quickly finding the biblical evidence inconclusive, Craig carefully dissects the sixteen philosophical arguments for timelessness articulated in Brian Leftow's *Time and Eternity*. All but one of them he judges to be unsound. While there is much in this long chapter that will be of use to the divine temporalist, those with no current stake in the debate might occasionally wonder where it is all leading, since Craig's own theory is not made fully explicit until much later in the book. The (not unpleasant) feeling is as of having stumbled upon a second-hand copy of Leftow's book with extensive marginalia by an exceptionally perceptive reader. One problematic assumption that seems to infect several of Leftow's arguments is that if God is temporal then he is necessarily temporal. This assumption would imply that a temporal God is not necessary given time is not necessary. Craig argues convincingly that one could reject the assumption, since even if God is temporal he could have freely chosen not to make time and the universe



(pp. 14-5). Or one could reject the premise that the existence of time is contingent, as Newton apparently did (p. 19). Another assumption frequently invoked by Leftow against divine temporality is that according to the four-dimensionalism of modern physics whatever is at a time is also at a place. Craig holds that this argument depends on a reductionist conflation of 'physical time' and 'metaphysical time' (a distinction I will return to below). One important issue that runs through several of the arguments is whether a temporal God could continuously create time. Leftow suggests that there seems to be an explanatory circle in supposing a temporal God creates t at t . For the act of creation at t already presupposes that God exists at t . Craig replies that at least on a relational theory any time t is actually 'logically posterior' to some event, such as God's action (p. 21). The one argument against divine temporality that Craig finds promising (though not decisive) is that a temporal being necessarily suffers the misfortune of not enjoying all of its life at once. One could perhaps adopt the Roycean view that God's specious present covers all of time but, as Craig observes, this solution seems to have the unhappy consequence that God could not experience his specious present until he had endured to the end of time (p. 36).

The next three chapters take up three familiar arguments for divine temporality: only a temporal God is a person (Ch. 2); only a temporal God could act in the world (Ch. 3); only a temporal God could know tensed facts, such as what time it is now (Ch. 4). Craig rejects the first argument on the grounds that a timeless being could be conscious (of eternal facts), rational (in the sense of not violating any epistemic duties), and have volitions (to possess his eternal goods). On the other hand, Craig grants that a timeless God would not have future-directed intentions, or the pleasures of learning or anticipation. Nor would he, *qua* timeless and changeless, be capable of interacting with human persons. For Craig, this merely points to the value of the Ockhamist idea that God exists timelessly *sans* creation but enters into relations with temporal events and human persons at the instant of creation (p. 53). The argument that God could not act in the world without being in time is sound, according to Craig, but only assuming the world's time is tensed. If the tenseless theory of time is true, then he thinks there is no problem about a timeless God acting in the temporal realm (pp. 108-9). Here Craig raises a number of very strong objections against atemporalist efforts to handle the problem, such as the traditional Thomistic idea that God does not stand in a real relation to creation, and the Stump-Kretzmann model of "ET-simultaneity." But his reasons for thinking the same problem is avoided on a tenseless theory of time are open to question. If the problem is that God's actions in the world acquire temporal locations, then that will be so even if times have dates but not tenses. If the problem is that God's interaction with the temporal world necessarily implies a (relational) change in God, then that will be so even if the change is only the bringing about of different effects at different dates rather than the bringing about of different effects at different nows. The last of the three arguments for divine temporality is that an atemporal God could not know what time it is now (or was or will be). Craig offers detailed and trenchant criticisms of recent attempts to reconcile divine

atemporality and omniscience. Less compelling is his response to those who urge that omniscience must not be expected of a perfect being. Leftow, for example, points out that God could not know what it is like to be a failure oneself, just as a human being could not know what it is like to be a bat. Craig's reply, that these cases do not involve ignorance of propositions, is beside the point, unless one is prepared to deny that humans would really learn something by becoming aware of batty experience. Nevertheless, Craig is surely right that even if God's perfection prevents him from knowing such things as first-personal failure, it should not prevent him from knowing what time it is now (p. 130). He is also obviously right that this problem does not arise for the atemporalist if the world's time is tenseless. In this respect, the tenseless theory of time seems to offer "a way out for defenders of divine timelessness" (p. 132). Alas, according to Craig the way out is really a dead end since the tenseless theory is false. (For details, Craig refers the reader to two companion volumes: *The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* (2000) and *The Tenseless Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* (2000).)

In Part II ('God and Time') Craig undertakes the large task of reconciling divine temporality, the tensed theory of time, and modern physics. He begins with an interesting historical *excursus* on the theological underpinnings of Newton's conceptions of absolute space and time. Drawing upon recent scholarship (especially by I. B. Cohen and J. E. McGuire) which reveals that God's relation to the physical world was an important concern throughout Newton's life, and not just in his dotage, Craig concludes that the "classical, Newtonian conception of time is rooted in a theistic metaphysic" (p. 157). But this conclusion seems to be stronger than the scholarly evidence warrants. It is one thing to acknowledge Newton's own conviction in the famous General Scholium that to discourse of God from the appearances of things "does certainly belong to natural philosophy." But it is quite another thing to say that the concept of time in his physics is "rooted" in his theism. After all, the General Scholium discussing God and the world does not even appear in the first edition of the *Principia* but only in the much later second edition. Granted Newton was not a twentieth century positivist, neither was he a thirteenth century scholastic.

Einstein's epistemology, on the other hand, was certainly broadly positivistic, at least around the time of the Special Theory of Relativity (STR). And Craig argues that only excessive verificationism requires the standard Einsteinian interpretation of STR, which prohibits absolute simultaneity and any privileged frame of reference. He points out that Lorentz early provided an interpretation of STR which, although empirically equivalent to Einstein's model, retains a privileged frame of reference in the form of a physically undetectable ether. Craig's provocative and informed defense of Neo-Lorentzian models of relativity is valuable, even apart from questions about theism. (Those interested may wish to consult yet another recent volume by Craig: *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity* (2001).) Yet one must emphasize that if the Einsteinian and Neo-Lorentzian models are really empirically equivalent, then Ockham's razor should eliminate the latter for positing an empirically

superfluous spacetime structure. On this point, Craig suggests that such methodological constraints "can be overridden by considerations broader than the laws of motion" (p. 189). Perhaps so; but Craig spends precious little time on the important methodological question of when metaphysical or theological considerations can "override" empirical ones. Since he frequently uses the label "verificationist" as a club, Craig owes the reader a more detailed explanation and defense of his own methodological assumptions.

Craig finds in the General Theory of Relativity (GTR) a physical candidate for the privileged frame whose planes of simultaneity would constitute the "moving now" of a temporal God. This is "cosmic time": the measure of the rate of expansion of the universe as a whole since the Big Bang. Of course, there is a problem associating God's time too closely with cosmic time since cosmic time depends on empirically contingent features of the universe, such as the statistically homogenous distribution of mass-energy. If such conditions do not obtain then cosmic time does not exist, and if they change then cosmic time itself changes. But surely God's time would not then not exist or change. Craig insists that such worries do not take account of the distinction (which he frequently invokes) between God's "metaphysical time" and the universe's "physical time": metaphysical time and cosmic time are "presently *coincident* though not *identical*" (p. 242). But it is not clear how there can be two coincident times, any more than there can two coincident spaces. Craig suggests: "cosmic time and metaphysical time, while radically different in that one is physical and the other is not, pick out the same duration under different names" (p. 244). But isn't this rather like saying that 'coriander' and 'cilantro' are radically different even though they pick out the same herb under different names?

The final two chapters return to a problem of traditional theology: creation *ex nihilo*. Craig argues, on biblical and philosophical grounds, that the universe and (tensed) time were both created out of nothing in the finite past. The philosophical arguments are based on the impossibility of an actually infinite number of past years and the need to block the question why God waited an infinite time before creating the universe. If these arguments are successful and time has a beginning, it follows that God's life has both an atemporal and a temporal stage. *Sans* creation, God exists alone in a timeless, unchanging state. At the first instant of creation (the Big Bang) God is simultaneous with, but causally prior to, the universe. After that, his time flows along with the expansion of the universe. This model is perhaps hard to grasp, and the metaphysical and physical arguments by which Craig arrives at it are difficult and complex. But although I have registered serious reservations, the force of Craig's arguments are finally as evident as his broad learning and philosophical acumen. So it will be impossible for proponents of other models to ignore this important contribution to philosophical theology and the philosophy of time.