

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 27 | Issue 3

Article 2

7-1-2010

An Essay on Eden

Hud Hudson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Hudson, Hud (2010) "An Essay on Eden," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol27/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

AN ESSAY ON EDEN

Hud Hudson

Despite an impressive tradition, modern literalists about the Garden of Eden have come under severe criticism and ridicule on the grounds that contemporary science has thoroughly discredited such a view. Accordingly, the prevailing trend in modern theology is to dehistoricize the Fall. I am no fan of literalism, but in this paper I argue that these grounds are in need of supplementation by a piece of metaphysics that has not been adequately defended. Absent the additional metaphysical thesis, it is possible to grant all the alleged implications of our modern worldview informed by physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, and biology and nevertheless remain a proponent of literalism – without becoming a proper object of ridicule. Or, if still ridiculous, this status will have to be established by discrediting a piece of metaphysics and not by admiring the fruits of empirical science.

Sometimes you find yourself in a debate featuring several competing views, you have a horse in the race, and you're doing your best to back your favorite. But it seems to you that one of the other views that you don't endorse has been treated unjustly. Perhaps you think it hasn't been formulated properly, or perhaps you think it has been formulated properly but owing to the undistinguished credentials of its proponents it hasn't received a fair hearing, or perhaps you think it has been both successfully formulated and heard but that it has been too-hastily dismissed on inadequate grounds. Nothing new there.

Occasionally, though, this dismissal becomes so popular and so contemptuous that it invites ridicule both of the position and of its former adherents, and should anyone be foolish enough to continue to express any sympathy for the view, it invites and sustains charges of irremediable stupidity or perhaps even of wickedness. Understandably, even though you don't endorse the view and, in fact, would like to see it refuted, you may develop an interest in trying to help rescue it from the fate of being cast aside for insufficient reasons and in trying to interfere with the constant bad-mouthing of its would-be champions. The present paper revolves around an example of this kind.

First, let me say something about the kind of argument that generates such a contemptuous dismissal.¹ Every once in awhile one encounters a

¹A portion of this paragraph of the text is taken from chapter 8 of *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), in which I investigated and critically evaluated several other instances of this general argument type.



particularly aggressive brand of atheism that mistakes some amorphous thing called 'our modern worldview' for an invulnerable fortress, sets up residence there, and then launches volleys from the apparent safety of its walls against various Christian doctrines and themes. Some of these offensives are sophisticated and challenging, some are not, and some appear to be more sophisticated and challenging than they are. Here is the central form of the kind of argument in question.

- 1) Christians believe that P.
- 2) Our modern worldview implies that P is false.
- 3) If (1) and (2), then we are justified in believing that the Christian belief that P is false.
- 4) Hence, we are justified in believing that the Christian belief that P is false.

As stated, this argument form might well be thought to have a few vulnerabilities. There are, of course, numerous and long-lasting disputes on the minimal belief-conditions for being Christian, and thus substitutions on premise (1) are likely to prove controversial. Moreover, divergent opinions on the elusive referent and epistemic status of the phrase 'our modern worldview' (featured in premise (3)) are certain to generate disagreement concerning its power to undermine justification in those beliefs it contradicts. On the present occasion, however, I will be content to let premises (1) and (3) alone, and instead I will direct my critical remarks at what will play the role of premise (2) in the argument to be examined below.

If you were asked to identify a view that has the double-feature of being intimately connected with Christianity in the popular mind and of being the subject of almost universal rejection and withering criticism generated by an argument of the form just described, you would be hard pressed to find a better response than the following story (which I here present without the pretense of precisely representing any special tradition's or historical figure's take on the events, but rather in a popular-conception, mixed-bag, hodge-podge sort of way—making the view all that much more of a target).

Once upon a time, there was a privileged and sacred place that played a unique role in the divine plan . . . a garden planted eastward in Eden. In the midst of this garden God placed a man formed from the dust of the ground. God instructed him to care for the garden, provided him with a helpmate and companion, and forbade him to eat of one fruit—that of the tree of knowledge.

But although these our ancestors were made just and right—sufficient to have stood, though free to Fall—they rebelled against God and in so doing damaged themselves and their progeny in a way neither they nor any of their descendants could rectify on their own power, for this disobedience was punished by banishment from the garden

and the loss of a certain innocence, immunity, safety, and grace. Thus through sin did disease, suffering, and death come into our world.

Nowadays we're informed that no one save the incurable rubes I mentioned earlier can give this story any credence at all. To the extent that this or that untenable aspect of it is really bound up with Christianity proper . . . well, so much the worse for Christianity proper.

And it would seem that those in a position to reply on behalf of Christianity proper have largely adopted a strategy of retreat.² I'm certainly no authority or spokesman for that tradition, but my own view follows this path of retreat as well. . . . I take the Adam and Eve story (in almost all of its details) to be mythical. Although insofar as I believe the construction and preservation of that myth was conducted under the influence of the Holy Spirit, I take it to have special significance and to touch on topics of consequence to all human persons (near and far, past and future). While admiring memorable devices such as talking snakes and luscious yet forbidden fruits, I take the primary function of the myth to document the occurrence of a historical event involving our ancestors—namely, their falling away from God and their separating themselves and their descendants from the divine presence. Whether this Fall was embodied in some special individual or pair of individuals; whether it was accompanied by a loss of preternatural gifts; whether it marked a sudden change in the biology or genetics of its participants, or in the environment in which they lived and died, or in the laws that governed that environment—are all questions on which I am willing to take no stand whatsoever.

To be fair, such retreat isn't an exclusively modern phenomenon, and it is my understanding that the current inclination to regard tales of the Garden of Eden as charming and quaint allegory has early roots in prominent figures in the history of Christianity. Philo (in the first century), Origen (in the third century), and St. Ephraem and St. Gregory of Nyssa (both in the fourth century) all advocated a nonliteral interpretation of the story of the garden, its tree of life, its stunning variety of flora and fauna, and its remarkably well-behaved wildlife. But then again, equally prominent early literalists can be found, with St. Theophilus of Antioch (in the second century), St. Irenaeus and St. Hippolytus (both in the third century), and Bishop Epiphanius (in the fourth century) all arguing for the claims that Paradise was beneath the Heavens, its garden, trees, and rivers all material created things, and its genuine location eastward in Eden a historical reality.

Moreover (and significantly), it is my understanding that throughout much of Christian history, its leading figures have tended toward realist over figurative readings of the garden passages in Genesis. Undoubtedly, much of this consensus can be traced to the qualified endorsement of Au-

²This and the next four paragraphs of the text are again taken from chapter 8 of *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace*, in which I explored various aspects of Christianity (including the Garden myth) against the backdrop of a fourth spatial-dimension. For the historical references, I am indebted to Jean Delumeau's delightful *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995).

gustine and the heavy endorsement of Aquinas, with the Bishop of Hippo and the Angelic Doctor both fully acknowledging the spiritual meaning of the story while firmly insisting on the materiality of the tree of life and on the corporeality of the rivers watering a spatially located garden. Notwithstanding such champions, traditional reasons for finding realism attractive have always been controversial. Nevertheless they have been compelling to many. The justifications range from applying widely accepted principles about what factual lessons may be appropriately drawn from the different forms of narrative found in Scripture, to generating arguments to the [then] best explanation of the origin of species, to providing a temporary home for Enoch and Elijah—notable for being taken out of this world prior to their deaths (joined perhaps by the saints and martyrs), to furnishing a way for Christ to keep his promise to the good thief without thereby requiring a doctrine of immediate judgment and resurrection, to making a truth teller out of Paul and his tale of a third heaven in 2 Corinthians, to reconciling various claims in Revelation with what was already well known about the world's inhabitants and laws, to serving as a place of rest without decay for the bodies of the departed (or at least certain of their parts) to lie in wait for the day of judgment and hopeful resurrection.³

While running unopposed, as it were, generations of devoted and extravagant proponents of a historical Eden authored flowery passages on the characteristics of the garden and fought bitter arguments about the spatiotemporal location of Paradise, passages and arguments that frequently contain considerably more detail than the available evidence might have warranted. Despite these intricate and fascinating battles over geography and chronology, a commonly shared presumption among the combatants was that wherever Eden was located, the sin of our predecessors had rendered it inaccessible to us—its paths now barred by a flaming sword and cherubim charged with making its entrance impassable to all flesh. Of course, agreement on the impassibility doctrine would lead to a conviction that a certain kind of resolution to the dispute on location was simply unattainable; with cherubim on patrol, it's not as if the winning theory simply awaited verification by expedition.

Inevitably, however, the wild exuberance of the Middle Ages and the remarkable ingenuity of its realist representatives gave way to a sobering this-worldly orientation of the 18th Century and to apologetic and more scientifically-informed Christians who (feeling the pressure of that oracle—our modern worldview) were willing and even eager to retreat to a symbolic reading of the Genesiac garden. Unsurprisingly, a primary catalyst for this turn of mind in the history of Christian thought was buried in the fossil beds and in what they appeared to say about the age of the Earth, the absence of a great deluge, and the origin of species. Or, to focus on a historically perplexing example, consider a mighty stumbling block for the Renaissance pastime of rediscovering the location of the garden

³Again, for the fascinating details, see Delumeau, *History of Paradise*.

on Earth: given the assumptions then in play, the garden must have been magnificently large in order to house the stunning variety of beasts and plants and water enough to supply four major rivers. For a variety of reasons, nonliteralism has prevailed.

How might we briefly state the case, then, from our modern worldview to the denial of our story? Perhaps as does Ian McFarland when explaining the trend in modern theology to dehistoricize the Fall:

An obvious objection to the idea of original sin is that it depends on a fallacious account of human history. In both its eastern and western forms, original sin refers to a historical act committed by the first human pair, the effects of which are passed on to all subsequent generations. The plausibility of this claim is undermined by contemporary scientific accounts of human origins, which deviate from that recorded in Genesis. It is now beyond dispute that there was no point when human existence was characterized by immunity from death, absence of labour pains, or an ability to acquire food without toil. Nor are the facts of evolutionary biology consistent with the descent of all human beings from a single ancestral pair (monogenesis). Instead the best available evidence suggests that modern humans emerged as a splinter population from pre-existing hominid groups within the last quarter of a million years. . . . [T]he geological record makes it clear that natural disasters, disease, suffering, and death long antedate the emergence of the human species. It follows that such phenomena cannot be interpreted as the consequence of human sin. Although the timescale of human evolution vastly exceeds that described in Genesis, the emergence of *Homo sapiens* remains a very recent development in the several-billion-year history of life on earth, and nothing suggests that humanity's advent occasioned any change in the basic conditions of biological existence.⁴

Such a summary of the deliverances of empirical science—of physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, and evolutionary biology—encourages greeting any remaining sympathetic talk of a historical garden with a mixture of pity and condescension at best (since it betrays such culpable innocence of what is now common knowledge) and with open and unreserved hostility at worst (since it endangers our children and society, in ways that aren't always carefully enumerated but that we can be sure are immediate and threatening).

So, that's the setup. I would now like to attempt to show that this argument from our modern worldview to the denial of our story is inadequate. In particular, it misrepresents itself as a contest between religion and empirical science (a contest we are all too often to regard as akin to a match between a toddler and an 800-pound gorilla), when in fact it requires supplementation by way of a piece of metaphysics that has not been adequately defended or even acknowledged. Absent the additional metaphysical thesis, it is possible for a proponent of the story to grant all the alleged implications of our modern worldview informed by physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, and biology, and nevertheless to retain

⁴Ian McFarland "The Fall and Sin," in *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 140–159.

adherence to the story without becoming a proper object of ridicule. Or, if still ridiculous, this status will have to be established by discrediting a piece of metaphysics and not by admiring the fruits of empirical science.⁵

A brief aside: In this respect, I think our present topic bears an interesting resemblance to debates supposedly between the empirical scientists and the metaphysicians. To illustrate—imagine that from the armchair you have worked your way to the belief that *P*, but it has recently been brought to your attention that physicists have been saying that not-*P*. What to do?

First option: be thankful you live amongst physicists who can instruct you on what to think, and proclaim to one and all that not-*P*.

Second option: worry about whether the experts have been quoted correctly—always, I suspect, a good option to explore if one comes upon the information by way of some popularization or other of genuine scientific work.

Third option: acknowledge the accuracy of the quote, but suspect that the speakers are overconfident about the strength of the evidence for the position in question—perhaps on general skeptical grounds or perhaps on grounds specific to and unflattering of prominent physicists. (It's not as if I think this scenario is often more likely than not; I'm just surprised to see it so frequently regarded as the round-square of the options—that physicists just couldn't be in error about what their evidence supports.)

Fourth option: suggest that in venturing far beyond, say, claims about which items play distinctive roles in physical theories, the physicists are out of their area of expertise and are speaking as naïve metaphysicians in endorsing the position in question.

Fifth option: maintain that the physicists don't see the controversial metaphysical underpinnings of their scientific results and that they are really engaged in a battle of metaphysics against metaphysics rather than the alleged one-sided embarrassment of physics against metaphysics. (Compare the response of the committed presentist or superluminal travel theorist confronted with alleged implications of Special Relativity.)

In returning to our main topic, then, let me confess that I suspect there is really a metaphysical thesis at issue, and a victory (if victory it turns out to be) for a proponent of our modern worldview will require him to wear at least two hats, one of science and one of metaphysics.

Eternalism, Presentism, and the Growing Block Thesis are three leading theories in the philosophy of time. Roughly, whereas Presentism holds

⁵A quick note: I'm not interested in arguing that those theists attracted to the story *must* be saddled with the metaphysics to come. Rather, I'm arguing that (despite enthusiastic reports from the front lines) they have not yet been refuted by the science at hand.

that only present things exist, the Growing Block Thesis recognizes the existence of both past and present items, while Eternalism countenances the existence of past, present, and even future objects. The literature on these matters is rich, the arguments deep and difficult, and the consequences for other areas of inquiry significant. Each theory has its able advocates; all are going-concerns in contemporary metaphysics. The moves I wish to make are, I believe, consistent with any of these theories, but they are clearest and most accessible when viewed against the backdrop of the Growing Block.⁶

The Growing Block Thesis offers us a picture of the universe featuring a spacetime volume that increases as time passes. At any given moment exactly one time is special—the time associated with the hyperplane on the surface of the Block in the direction of its growth. The outermost surface, so to speak, is the new slice on the block; it didn't exist moments before, and although it will continue to exist, it will not remain the outermost surface moments hence. During its brief instant in the spotlight—before becoming evermore imprisoned in the Block's interior—its stock of facts and events are *present*. Soon they will become forever past and take their eternal places frozen in the Block, but for one shining moment they are privileged—balanced on the very edge of Being.

On some scorecards, the Growing Block Thesis is thought to combine the best features of its primary rivals. Like Presentism, it proclaims the uniqueness of the present, recognizes objective and irreducible temporal properties, takes tense seriously, and countenances the genuine passage of time. Like Eternalism, it furnishes truth-makers for past truths, provides relata for cross-temporal relations, and acknowledges the existence of many objects that are not present. Of course, this very combination of commitments is also alleged to be the source of its decisive refutation, with opponents complaining that if it were true, we (absurdly) could not know it is now now or else would risk living amongst zombies in the Block (i.e., amongst nonpresent existants with no consciousness).⁷ Other critiques balk at a privileged present and allege incompatibility with Special and General Relativity or else target the endorsement of time's passage, maintaining that the view must be supplemented by a hypertime in which the growing of the Block occurs and the rate of passage can be measured. Whereas I judge this latter criticism to be in error, I am nevertheless intrigued by the

⁶The least comfortable fit, however, will be with Presentism which would have to be conjoined with some additional (otherwise unmotivated) theses. For formulations and discussions of the Growing Block Thesis see C. D. Broad's *Scientific Thought* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923); and Michael Tooley's *Time, Tense and Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁷On the alleged obstacle to knowing whether it is now now, see Craig Bourne's "When am I?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80 (2002), pp. 359–371; and David Braddon-Mitchell's "How Do We Know it is Now Now?" *Analysis* 64 (2004), pp. 199–203. For the zombie problem, see Peter Forrest's "The Real but Dead Past: a Reply to Braddon-Mitchell," *Analysis* 64 (2004), pp. 358–362; and Chris Heathwood's "The Real Price of the Dead Past: a Reply to Forrest and Braddon-Mitchell," *Analysis* 65 (2005), pp. 249–251. For an attempt to undermine the motivation for the Growing Block Thesis, see Trenton Merricks's "Goodbye Growing Block," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 2 (2006), pp. 103–110.

combination of the Growing Block Thesis and the hypothesis of hypertime.⁸ Even if not wedded by necessity, this conjunction of theses initially seems both intelligible and metaphysically possible, and (significantly) not immediately disqualified by appeal to our modern worldview.

Entertaining our combination-view, we may maintain that Reality or the Block grows by a certain number of standard events per second and that it (normally) hypergrows at a certain number of ticktocks per second (where a ticktock is an interval of hypertime as a second is an interval of time).⁹ Recent literature reveals that the intelligibility and metaphysical possibility of this combination has also intrigued others, especially those who hope to exploit the resources of hypertime not to respond to a call for time's rate of passage but rather to account (*and in a very satisfying way*) for backwards time travel.¹⁰ The crucial observation—both in those discussions of time travel and in our present investigation—is quite simply that whereas for each instant of hypertime, the facts about what is past and present are determined by the features of the Block in existence at that hypertime, the features of the Block at one hypertime need not constrain its features at other hypertimes. Illustration of this point is more difficult in the time travel scenarios which are often complicated by further factors and are not embedded in a theistic discussion. Fortunately, though, God is front and center in our story and (perhaps) is able and willing to do the heavy lifting. Allow me to explain.

Omnipotent as He is, God has it within His Power to bring about any state of affairs consistent with His essential nature. (Insert excepting-clauses into that claim if you are libertarian on free will or a fan of indeterministic devices.) The Growing Block, like each of its contents, is a contingent entity. At any given hypertime, there could have been no Block at all, or the same Block with different contents, or the same contents in a different Block, or a different Block with different contents, or a piece of the old Block surrounded by bits of a new one, and so on. Moreover, apart from

⁸J. C. Smart challenges the notion of temporal becoming and raises pointed questions about the need for a hypertime in his "The River of Time," *Mind* 58 (1949), pp. 483–494; and in his "The Space-Time World: an Excerpt from *Philosophy and Scientific Realism*," reprinted in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 94–101. Ned Markosian meets this challenge without resort to hypertime in his "How Fast Does Time Pass?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993), pp. 829–844.

⁹In his "Changing the Past," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* (forthcoming), Peter van Inwagen adopts this strategy for measuring the growth of the Block in time by letting a standard event be a single vibration of a cesium atom and by assuming the number of cesium atoms to remain constant. Other stand-ins for standard events are available. Moreover, we are free to choose the hypertime interval named by 'ticktock,' and for convenience let it be the interval that (normally) yields one second of growth on the Block. The need for the parenthetical-qualification '(normally)' both in this note and the main text will emerge shortly.

¹⁰See G. C. Goddu's "Time Travel and Changing the Past: (Or How to Kill Yourself and Live to Tell the Tale)," *Ratio* 16 (2003), pp. 16–32; and Peter van Inwagen's "Changing the Past," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* (forthcoming). For a critical discussion and extension of the proposed model of time travel to Eternalist and Presentist theories of time, see Hud Hudson and Ryan Wasserman's "van Inwagen on Time Travel and Changing the Past," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* (forthcoming).

sequences inconsistent with the divine nature, there are no metaphysically necessary rules on how things look block-wise from one hypertime to the next. God’s powers of creation and annihilation extend from seamlessly replacing one Block with another in hypertime, to destroying large portions of a Block’s leading edge at a hypertime instant, to altering large portions of everything but a Block’s leading edge at a hypertime instant. It is this final case that will prove to be of interest to us here.

As a warm-up exercise, suppose that God’s creative activity had taken the following form. At hypertime H_0 , God created the very first “slice” (or, more carefully, hyperplane) of the very first Block in hypertime history and set it a go. Standard events transpired as standard events are wont to do, new hyperplanes charted the Block’s growth, time began slipping into the future at a rate of n standard events per second, and the seconds shuffled by at a steady rate of one second per ticktock of hypertime. After one minute had transpired, at H_{60} , God brought into existence a solitary angel, and after another minute had transpired, at H_{120} , God brought into existence a second angel as a companion for the first. After observing their interaction for yet another minute, at H_{180} , God annihilated the hyperplanes corresponding to the two minutes of the Block nearest its leading edge and replaced them with a single slice inhabited by two angels. God then observed their interaction for a final minute at which time it was also H_{240} . (Figure 1 provides an image to orient you, in which the vertical axis represents time and the horizontal axis hypertime. As is customary in such figures, one spatial dimension has been suppressed, and thus our familiar trio of spatial dimensions at any time is represented by the perfectly-square, two-dimensional cross section of the block corresponding to that time on the vertical axis.) What can be said of the world at this point in the story?

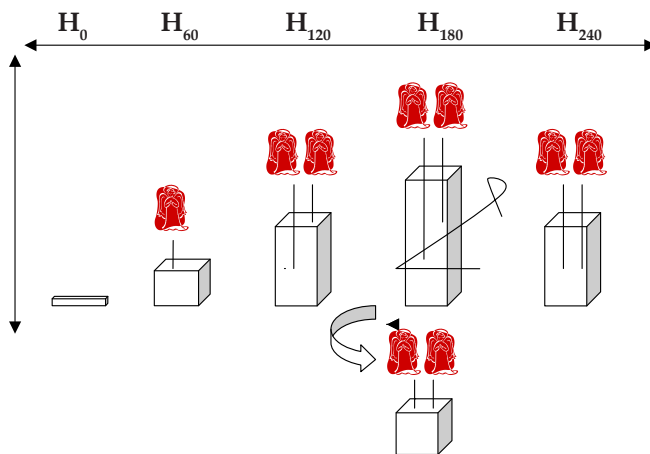


Figure 1

In response to this question, we would do well to insist on two rather different replies, sharply separating what is true about the past at H_{240} and what is true about the hyperpast at H_{240} . *First story first:* At H_{240} , the Block is two minutes old (even though at the hyperearlier H_{180} it was three minutes old). It is now and has always been true that there was never any solitary angel in existence, for there exists only a pair of angels who are exactly the same age—both one minute or 60 ticktocks old. *Second story:* At H_{240} , it is hypernow and hyperhistorically true that there hyperwas a solitary angel in existence, despite the fact that every angel that has ever existed has had a companion at all the times it was ever present.

These perplexing pronouncements escape contradiction only by being carefully sorted into claims about what is true now and in the past at a hypertime—*facts that are fixed by how the Block that is present at that hypertime is constituted*—and into claims about what is true hypernow and hyperhistorically—*facts that are fixed by how the Blocks that are present at successive hypertimes are constituted*.

Note also that from the perspective of hyperhistory, the Block twice had the property of being exactly one-and-a-half minutes old. This hyperoccurred at H_{90} and hyperagain at H_{210} . Moreover, at those two hypertimes the Block was exactly the same at all its regions corresponding to the first minute of its history, yet different at all its regions corresponding to the remaining 30 seconds of its history. Whereas hyperearlier it contained a solitary angel during that 30-second interval, hyperlater it didn't. Absent hypertime, the slogan "*if now past—forevermore past*" is secure and true, but with the hypertime backdrop in place, the slogan "*if now hyperpast—forevermore past*" falls to counterexample, provided the right sequence of Blocks line up in a cooperative way in hypertime.¹¹

We should now be primed for the application of our metaphysical picture of time and God's powers of creation and annihilation to our main theme. Consider the following hypothesis:

In the beginning—perhaps not at the first hypertime, but at the first hypertime to contain a Block universe—God created a spacetime and its contents whose earliest stages of growth witnessed the forming of a man from the dust of the ground, the planting of a garden into which he was placed, the adorning of that garden with trees and rivers, the imposition of a restriction on his diet, the presentation and naming of the animals, the extraction of a rib from and creation of a companion

¹¹In fact, we have traded one slogan for sixteen. (1) if now past—forever past, (2) If now past—forever hyperpast, (3) if now past—forhyperever past, (4) if now past—forhyperever hyperpast, (5) if now hyperpast—forever past, (6) if now hyperpast—forever hyperpast, (7) if now hyperpast—forhyperever past, (8) if now hyperpast—forhyperever hyperpast, (9) if hypernow past—forever past, (10) if hypernow past—forever hyperpast, (11) if hypernow past—forhyperever past, (12) if hypernow past—forhyperever hyperpast, (13) if hypernow hyperpast—forever past, (14) if hypernow hyperpast—forever hyperpast, (15) if hypernow hyperpast—forhyperever past, (16) if hypernow hyperpast—forhyperever hyperpast. (The reader with hypertime on her hands is invited to determine just how many of these theses must surrender to counterexample.)

for him, the fateful discourse of a snake . . . and a rebellion which took the form of eating an apple. And as the Block grew, this once naked and innocent pair fashioned clothing, hid themselves and were found, confessed their disobedience, and received the heavy news of its consequences. Finally, driven out of the garden, they and their world underwent a spectacular change.

At the hypermoment the pair exited the garden, say at $H_{10\text{-million}}$. God annihilated every piece of the Block save that region on its outermost edge thus occupied by these ancestors of ours and then embedded that very region and its contents in a new Block—a Block sporting a several-billion-year history, replete with ice ages, long-dead hominids, dinosaurs, primordial soups, condensing matter, even a big bang.

In fact, their brave new world—the very Block universe that is hyper-present now—is remarkably accurately described in great detail by contemporary physics and astronomy, chemistry and geology. Moreover, this special pair of our ancestors themselves had ancestors from whom they descended in precisely the manner taught by evolutionary biology.

Fill in the rest of the story as a devoted disciple of contemporary science; the new sections of the Block are a ready canvas to be painted as our modern world view instructs. We are in a position to concede its correctness on all fronts.

Moreover, if you tend toward a mereological essentialism for Blocks, note that nothing hangs on one and the same Block surviving the annihilation-and-recreation of this version of the Fall, so long as the new Block sports the salient piece of the old one (together with its occupants). And also note that, quite in step with tradition, this version of the Fall has profound consequences not just for our protagonists, but for all of creation.

Again, in the process of entertaining this entertaining hypothesis, we would do well to insist on distinguishing two different sets of claims, those reporting history and those reporting hyperhistory. History, for example, indeed reveals that “modern humans emerged as a splinter population from pre-existing hominid groups within the last quarter of a million years,” and perhaps our pair appeared at a unique threshold in this development as the very first creatures also to be persons. To be sure, they never lived carefree lives of safety in a garden, immune from the dangers of a world red in tooth and claw. On the contrary, their existence was one of constant peril and entirely given over to toil for food, shelter, and the basic necessities of life. But hyperhistory has a different story to tell. This very same pair, *once upon a hypertime*, lived in just such a garden and in just such an innocent state, blessed and protected by a special grace. Of course, despite tremendous efforts and many false reports across the centuries, no one has ever found the least trace of this original home, for the simple and

obvious reason that it never existed. It may have hyperexisted—but well, you just can't get hyperthen from here.

There are many ways to flesh out the story at this point. Here's one. These parents of ours would have no memory of their experiences in the garden, for after all those experiences didn't happen to them (they hyperhappened) and memories are drawn from one's past (not always from one's hyperpast). Perhaps—once repositioned in the newly-furnished Block—the special couple in our story were among the very first individuals to rise to rationality, to achieve the status of being moral agents, to exercise their newfound capacity to sin. Perhaps one of them can be credited with *the original sin*—the first in all of history. Perhaps it was a sin of disobedience. Perhaps it even involved an apple. Examining the contents of the Block will tell. If they were to happen to satisfy these historical descriptions (in addition to committing the hyperhistorical sin occasioning the Fall) our couple would have played precisely the sort of role envisioned for some genuine historical figures or other by those who have abandoned hope of a literal reading of the garden myth but who maintain that it nevertheless represents a genuine moment in history when our forebears turned away from God.

A reminder: I am one of those people. I'm not inclined to countenance hypertime, and I don't believe our entertaining hypothesis is true. I agree that the literal reading should be abandoned and that a pared-down historical event stripped of those characteristics offending our modern worldview should be raised in its place. But I don't think our modern worldview is in a position to foist this verdict upon us, since for all I can tell, that worldview is consistent with a metaphysics that permits us *to eat our cake and hyper have it too*—that is, that allows us to say there never was such a garden, but also that there hyperwas.

There are, of course, other routes to rejection of our entertaining hypothesis. I think a proper refutation would be best grounded in some worry about occupation relations between objects and regions, or in worries about whether causation is supposed to track history or hyperhistory, or in personal identity across hypertimes (e.g., the psychological criterion of persistence for persons seems to be at odds with the details of our story), or in some philosophical objection designed to show that the hypertimes of our story are just mislabeled times, whereas the times of our story are something else altogether. But, again, these topics take us immediately into metaphysical waters.¹²

Theological obstacles may surface as well. Aren't the Scriptures and the Church Fathers unnecessarily quiet about hypertime, especially if it has such a lavish role to play? Perhaps, but then again, loading up Genesis with heavy-handed descriptions of hypertime and spacetime manifolds

¹²I defend theses about the occupation relation that would provide an objection of the first sort in chapter 4 of *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace*, and I defend theses about parthood and persistence that would provide an objection of the second sort in chapters 3–5 of my *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

might have made it a bit less accessible to its intended audience.¹³ But isn't it clear that tradition places the story in our own past and not in our hyper-past? Perhaps it's not so clear. Tradition says these events happened, but that may prove to be a commitment neutral between history and hyper-history. Without the resources to say so, tradition certainly doesn't take an explicit stand against hyperhistory, and once the distinction is on the table and choices are to be made, spoils-to-the-victor considerations may select hyperhistory as the best refinement.¹⁴ Still, theological objections may prevail, but as we are endlessly reminded, theology is not science—and if the present olive branch is ultimately dismissed on theological grounds, I simply remind the reader that the primary goal of this exercise was to block the dismissal by appeal to the science of our modern worldview.

In closing, I think it worthwhile to mention a few curious and pleasant features of the hypothesis. Although our past is clearly marked by a history of pain, disease, suffering, and death that long predates any original sin committed by our first parents with the requisite capacities, we may nevertheless continue to investigate the hypothesis that by way of the hyperoriginal sin (i.e., not the first sin to occur in time, but the first to occur in hypertime) did disease, suffering, and death make their way onto the hypertime stage and in just the way our story above would have it. Moreover, theologians attracted to a thesis of creation *ex nihilo* requiring a time at which God exists alone and apart from what is yet to be created may be favorably disposed towards hypertime and the resources it affords. Finally—given the details of the story above—even though there exists a Block that reaches some 10 to 20 billion years into the past, and even though its interior contains dinosaurs and the like, none of those items was ever present or on the outermost face of the growing Block (for they all came into being together).¹⁵ Accordingly, if those theorists who have defended the growing Block theory from the critiques catalogued above are correct to claim that the Block's occupants are conscious only when they are located on its outermost edge—then we also get a solution to the problem of preFall animal pain and suffering for free. (Or nearly for free, since one cost would involve affirming that consciousness had a surprisingly dramatic and abrupt debut in world history.) Still, all in all, those aren't inconsiderable advantages.

But whether any benefit comes from there being hypertimes at which there are no times or from having both an original sin and a hyperoriginal sin to choose from when dealing with the thorny problems raised by the doctrine of original sin or by general creation or by natural evil is a topic for another occasion.

¹³Compare Peter van Inwagen's "Genesis and Evolution," reprinted in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 128–162. Alternatively, Michel Barnes floated the hopeful hypothesis in conversation that the Church Fathers may not be so silent on the topic, after all! See Origen on creation.

¹⁴Thanks to Josh Armstrong for discussion on this point.

¹⁵Thanks to Aris Hudson for pressing this point.

In conclusion, then, I submit that the argument from our modern worldview to the denial of our story has been exposed as inadequate. Before we can indulge the inclination to ridicule or to insist on a simple correction of a primitive and outmoded religious view drawn exclusively from empirical science, we have a metaphysical debate to recognize and evaluate. Accordingly, to the extent that one can keep the growing-block-cum-hypertime thesis in play in the philosophy of time, one can also tell a *just-so story* accommodating both the relevant verdicts of our modern worldview and a full-blooded realism about a hyperhistorical garden.¹⁶

Western Washington University

¹⁶For comments, criticism, and encouragement to address such an academic-taboo, I thank Josh Armstrong, Michel Barnes, Matthew Benton, Michael Bergmann, Ross Cameron, Oliver Crisp, Alicia Finch, Tom Flint, Peter Forrest, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Aris Hudson, Joseph Jedwab, Shieva Kleinschmidt, Matthew Lee, Brian Leftow, Alvin Plantinga, Michael Rea, Thomas Senor, Amy Seymour, Achille Varzi, Ryan Wasserman, Dean Zimmerman, and two anonymous referees for *Faith and Philosophy*.