

Presentism, Timelessness, and Evil¹

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Abstract: There is an objection to divine timelessness which claims that timelessness shouldn't be adopted since on this view evil is never "destroyed," "vanquished," "eradicated" or defeated. By contrast, some divine temporalists think that presentism is the key that allows evil to be destroyed/vanquished/eradicated/defeated. However, since presentism is often considered to be inconsistent with timelessness, it is thought that the presentist solution is not available for defenders of timelessness. In this paper I first show how divine timelessness is consistent with a presentist view of time and then how defenders of Presentist-Timelessness can adopt the presentist solution to the removal of evil. After this, I conclude the paper by showing that it's far from clear that the presentist solution is successful and that unless one weakens what is meant by the destruction/vanquishing/eradication/defeat of evil, one can only make the presentist solution work by adopting a number of additional assumptions that many will find unattractive.

Keywords: God and Time, Evil, Timelessness, Divine temporality, Presentism

Some object to divine timelessness by claiming that this view implies that evil is never "destroyed" (Ward 2001, 162), "vanquished" (Craig 2001a, 66; 2001b, 214; 2008, 609–610; Copan & Craig 2004, 162, n. 29), "eradicated" (Peckham 2021, 108) or defeated (Mullins 2014, 127–132; 2021a, 107) and as such divine timelessness should be rejected.² Exactly what "destroying," "vanquishing," "eradicating," and defeating amounts to is sadly never much discussed by advocates of the argument, but at the very least it seems they all involve the requirement that evil no longer exists.³ Since the concept of "defeat" is familiar within the literature on

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² I take this argument to be against divine timelessness, and so not one that requires other attributes like simplicity.

³ Mullins comes closest to providing a discussion of his terminology, namely defeat. However, whilst he does cite Adams (Mullins 2014, 127, n.37; 2021a, 100), the notion itself gets relatively

evil (e.g. Adams 1999; 2006; Stump 2010, chap. 13), it is the one I shall employ here, where the definition we shall run with requires that whatever else defeat amounts to, it is necessary that evil must no longer exist.⁴ The argument can then be put as follows:

1. If God is timeless then evil is never defeated.
2. Christian teaching has it that evil is defeated.⁵
3. Therefore, God cannot be timeless.

The concern of this paper is to begin to assess this argument's potency against divine timelessness.⁶ In order to do this I will first show how defenders of the argument go about supporting (1); namely by arguing that presentism makes it the case that there is no evil in the new creation and that divine timelessness is incompatible with presentism. I will then challenge both of these points. Firstly, by showing that divine timelessness is compatible with presentism, such that defenders of timelessness can adopt the presentist solution. And then by raising some concerns about the presentist solution, suggesting that it may not achieve the result advocates of the argument think it does.

Presentism to the rescue!

Before suggesting how a defender of divine timelessness might respond to the argument, it's worth noting how advocates of the argument think they can affirm the defeat of evil, such that evil no longer exists. The key is the adoption of a

little attention, with the reader being told that "God must make it the case that their suffering comes to an end . . . God must take them out of the environment where they are vulnerable to horrors . . . God must heal them." (2021a, 107)

⁴ It's not clear that Adams, who is the most well-known defender of "defeating" evil, would agree with such a requirement, since her definition doesn't seem to include it: "The evil *e* can be defeated if it can be included in some good-enough whole to which it bears a relation of organic (rather than merely additive) unity; *e* is defeated within the context of the individual's life if the individual's life is a good whole to which *e* bears the relevant organic unity" (1999, 28). Stump, who also focuses on defeat, does not include it either: "To say that her suffering was defeated for her is to say that there was a benefit from her suffering, that that benefit came primarily to her, that it would not have come without her suffering, and that it significantly outweighed her suffering" (2022, 5). Nevertheless, since the above argument requires the non-existence of evil I shall assume it here, but it should be clear given what has been said that many may find fault with the argument from the get-go and therefore wish to use another notion other than 'defeat' to run it, such as Hollingsworth's 'Elimination of Evil (EOE)' (forthcoming, 1).

⁵ I focus on Christian teaching here, since this is what the authors of the articles I'm responding to focus upon. Nonetheless, a claim like this is not one only Christians may accept, for instance see Lebens and Goldschmidt (2017), who argue for something similar from a Jewish perspective.

⁶ I say begin, since there is more to be said regarding eternalist views of timelessness, as well as the justification for (2). These are topics I aim to address elsewhere (Page, *manuscript a*).

particular metaphysical view concerning the nature of time, namely presentism. For although presentism has proved difficult to define,⁷ it is often taken to imply that only present entities exist.⁸ Given this, only the present temporal instant exists, and therefore no past or future temporal instants exist.⁹ As such, in the present instant the evil acts that I performed in the past do not exist, and neither do any future acts of evil that I will perform. Rather only those acts of evil that are being done in the present instant exist. This is taken to help explain the defeat of evil, since according to the Christian tradition believers in the new creation will be perfected such that they will no longer do evil, and if all that exists in the new creation is the present instant of perfected non-evil doing believers, then evil will not exist either.¹⁰ The result of this, so say these theorists, is that the necessary condition for defeat can be met, evil exists no more, and therefore those who want to follow Christian teaching should be presentists.

Timelessness, what's the problem?

From this alone it may not be clear what the problem for defenders of divine timelessness is, since so far I've had no need to mention God's relationship to time. However, the advocates of the argument claim that timelessness is incompatible with presentism, and therefore the solution offered above is unavailable for defenders of timelessness. Instead, it is supposed that the defender of divine timelessness must adopt eternalism, which then allows advocates of the argument to claim that eternalism is incompatible with their notion of defeat, since on eternalism all instants of time exist, and so even in the new creation the temporal instants containing my earlier acts of evil exist. Given these two problems, it is suggested that we should be divine temporalists, since it is claimed that only divine temporality is compatible with presentism, and only presentism allows for the defeat of evil.¹¹

⁷ For some, such as Tallant & Ingram (2021), the situation is much worse than this as they argue that there is no distinctive core amongst views which are called presentist.

⁸ This has led some to define presentism to be a thesis about *what exists*, with Crisp defining presentism as, "for every *x*, if *x* existed, exists, or will exist, then *x* is a present thing" (2004a, 18; Sider 2001, 11–17; Rea 2003, 246; Bourne 2006, 13; Markosian 2004, 47). However other presentists think that presentism should be defined as a thesis concerning *what it is to exist* (e.g. Merricks 2007, 124–135; Tallant 2014).

⁹ I speak of instants as a *façon de parler*, and so one should take it to be neutral concerning whether time is discrete or continuous, substantivalist or relationalist.

¹⁰ One can substitute "new creation" for "heaven," if they wish, but I will speak of new creation throughout.

¹¹ This whole concern is evident in the writings of Mullins (2014, 123ff), Peckham (2021, 99), and Craig (2008, 609–610, 600). Whilst in other places Craig and Mullins don't make the incompatibility claim regarding presentism and timelessness explicit, they think the argument we are addressing is problematic given eternalism (Craig 2001a, 66; 2001b, 214; Copan & Craig

There is much to argue with here, such as whether an eternalist really cannot make sense of the defeat of evil, but challenging this will have to wait for another time. Rather, what I will argue in the next few sections is that timelessness is compatible with presentism, and therefore advocates of timelessness can adopt the presentist solution.

Presentism and timelessness

Mullins writes, in “current debates over God’s relationship to time, it is widely agreed that God cannot be timeless if presentism is true, but that God can be timeless if four-dimensional eternalism is true” (2014, 123).¹² Mullins might be right about the wide agreement, for it is at least clear that many who affirm divine timelessness are eternalists (Rogers 2000, chap. 5; Helm 2010; Mawson 2008), and it is certainly easier to see how timelessness and eternalism fit together. Nevertheless, I think it’s far from clear that divine timelessness is incompatible with presentism. Perhaps that puts me in the present minority, but I am by no means alone in thinking this (e.g. Leftow 1991; 2018; McCann 2012, chap. 3).¹³ Here, I can only begin to explain why I take the two to be compatible, for it is beyond the scope of this paper to show how a timeless God can cause things in a temporal world, how concerns about omniscience can be overcome, etc., and I do so by providing what I take to be a coherent model for understanding how a timeless God can exist alongside a presentist world.¹⁴

2004, 162, n.29; Mullins 2021a), and contend elsewhere that presentism is incompatible with timelessness (Craig, 2001c, 139, 282; Mullins 2016). Ward (2001, 162) may present this concern as well, but Ward’s words leave it very unclear as to whether he thinks divine timelessness requires an eternalist view of time. Hollingsworth (2023) also argues that presentism is required for the elimination of evil (2023, 2), or perhaps merely that presentism is the best out of some potential options (2023, 13, 16), but he doesn’t explicitly say that this requires divine temporality.

¹² Divine temporalists, such as Mullins (2016, 30, chaps. 4–5) Craig (2001c, 139, 232), Hasker (2011, 14–15), Peckham (2021, 99–110), have provided arguments for this claim. I cannot address these here, so all I can say is that I’m not persuaded by them and have responded to one of them elsewhere (2023). Additionally, even some eternalists who take God to be timeless, like Rogers, also think timelessness and presentism are incompatible (2000, 59). Rogers’s main reason for this seems to be that she thinks presentism will just imply that God is timeless, as will become evident in the following paragraph, and her other arguments for thinking the two incompatible have been responded to by Leftow (2009).

¹³ In so far as other defenders of divine timelessness want to allow for tensed facts (Stump and Kretzmann 1981, 455–458; Wierenga 1989, 175–190), and an absolute temporal now (Stump 2018, 119), this may give us reason to think that they too think presentism is compatible with timelessness, although it would be too quick to state this decisively, as they may only mean to support something like a growing block or moving-spotlight theory instead. It’s also clear that many historical classical theists thought that presentism and divine timelessness were compatible (Mullins 2016, 74–76).

¹⁴ For more on providing models in philosophy of religion see my (*forthcoming*).

However, let me first address an initial concern one might have, namely that this prospect is doomed from the outset, since it might be thought that presentism implies that *everything* that exists must exist in the present, and since the present moment is temporal, then God too must be temporal. Rogers makes such a claim when she writes that on presentism “all that exists is the present moment. That means that God exists only in the present moment, since that is all there is” (2011, 11). And Rhoda says the same when he writes, “if presentism is true and God exists, then like everything else God exists now, in the present. The theistic presentist is thus committed to a temporal concept of God” (2009, 53). As we shall see momentarily, I think a presentist can think that everything that exists must exist in *a* present without thinking that everything is temporal, but it is also worth pointing out that many presentists have restricted views of presentism so to allow for the existence of non-temporal entities (Crisp 2004b, 46; Craig 2000, 227; Merricks 2007, 120, n. 1; Leftow 2018, 175).¹⁵ For instance, Bourne writes, “presentism is a theory about what actually exists in time; it says nothing about the existence of anything else. Presentism, like any other theory of time, can have more in its ontology than just objects located in the present” (2006, 79–80).¹⁶ Similarly, Lewis, an ardent four-dimensionalist, thought that presentism was a claim that allowed for non-temporal entities (2004, 4), for surely a presentist can be a Platonist.¹⁷ As such, it seems that there is a very respectable view of presentism that allows for the existence of entities which do not exist in the present.¹⁸

However, I don’t think we have to rely upon such views and can instead uphold that everything which exists must exist in a present, and still think a timeless God is possible.¹⁹ To see this, we will model the situation on a possible

¹⁵ Yet not all presentists allow such restrictions, such as Ingram (2019, chap. 1).

¹⁶ Although not a presentist, Cameron makes the same point, writing, “As I see it, it is compatible with presentism that there exist some things that are not present entities, because they simply do not exist in time at all—such as numbers, or (on some views) God.” (2015, 7)

¹⁷ One might worry that the definition Crisp gives of presentism in footnote 8 does not allow for such abstracta, but he is willing to adjust the definition to overcome this concern (2004a, 18; 2004b, 43–46).

¹⁸ Leftow suggests this restricted form of presentism was in fact the dominant view until very recently, with universal presentism being largely a late twentieth-century phenomenon. (2018, 175)

¹⁹ Much of this section and the “not too fast” section is indebted to Leftow (2018), which builds upon some elements found throughout his earlier work (1991). Here I take the thrust of the view and elaborate on certain elements, as well as try to make it more perspicuous, since many often claim to fail to understand what Leftow means when it comes to God’s relationship with time (e.g. Rogers, 2009, 321; Mullins, 2016, 153, n.93).

world that has two island universes within it.²⁰ In virtue of these universes being islands, they have two temporally unconnected timelines, since there are no temporal relations between each timeline, even though both timelines are contained within one possible world. Given this, we can say that the islands are extrinsically timeless, since they have no temporal relations to anything external to them. Suppose further that both universes are presentist in structure, such that in each universe all that exists will exist in *its* present. It's important to notice here that in virtue of these being island universes, each island will have a unique present, as if the two islands had presents which were temporally related then these wouldn't be island universes. As such in our first island universe, U1, t_1 is present, whereas in our second island universe, U2, t^*_4 is present. We thus have one possible world with two presents.

We can also have it that one of these islands is intrinsically timeless. In order to claim this first note that an instant is timeless if it is not possibly succeeded by other instants and/or does not possibly flow, whilst an instant is temporal if it is possibly succeeded by other instants and/or possibly flows.²¹ With this background we can claim that Island U1 has the interesting characteristic of being necessarily one instant *long*,²² and therefore there is necessarily no succession or flow in U1, and the instant t_1 never begins or ceases.²³ We can think of U1 as being what Latham and Miller call a one-instant or stopped presentist world (2020, 145; Tallant 2008, 118), which, as they note, are typically appealed to as timeless worlds. However, U2 is more than one instant long, and has a present which changes, such that there is succession and flow, and therefore we can say that U2 is a temporal universe. All of this we can put in diagrammatic form, such that our possible world with its two island universes looks as follows:

²⁰ Lewis (1986, 71–72) is famous for thinking this is an impossibility, but see Bricker (2020, chaps. 4 & 6), Baron and Tallant (2016), and Skow (2022, 282) for arguments affirming the possibility of island universes.

²¹ This possibility claim allows the first instant of time to be temporal even though it has not been succeeded by other instants and even if the first instant is never succeeded but possibly could have been.

²² One might worry that talk of an “instant” is misplaced for something timeless. Leftow (2002) provides some responses to these concerns, but if this “instant” talk is off putting, one could opt for Baron and Miller’s suggestion and talk of this island universe having no temporal dimension (Baron & Miller 2014, 2872), and thereby remove the need to speak of an instant. However, it’s not clear whether one will be able to speak of an eternal *present* in this case, and so also the claim that everything that exists exists in a present.

²³ Leftow (2002, 28) provides a reason why we shouldn’t say that t_1 begins or ceases given the temporal structure of U1.

with creation, and neither begins nor ceases to exist, since as I've already said, t_1 in U_1 doesn't begin or cease, and so exists permanently.

All of what has been described so far strikes me as possible, and yet if it is, then I claim that we have a good model for thinking about how a timeless God can exist alongside a presentist world.²⁷ If, however, one is less convinced, then I am willing to fall back on a form of presentism which allows for the existence of timeless entities, and then claim that my talk of island universes helps us model how those things which exist outside time relate to a presentist world. From now on, I'll refer to this model as Presentist-Timelessness, and whilst there is more to say about how the model explains a timeless God's relationship to a presentist world, what I've said so far I take to be sufficient by showing how in principle the two are not incompatible.²⁸

Presentist-Timelessness and Evil

The result of all this is that advocates of the argument we are assessing are incorrect to think that eternalism is the only game in town for someone who thinks that God is timeless. One can affirm divine timelessness and presentism. The question, therefore, is whether the presentist solution to defeating evil is available to someone who adopts Presentist-Timelessness about the Divine. On the face of it it seems so, for as will be remembered, presentism was thought to be required for the defeat of evil since in the future when the new creation exists no evils of the past will exist, for given presentism all that will exist is the present instant of the perfect new creation. Yet on the Presentist-Timelessness model the same will hold. For consider U_2 and the evil performed at t^*_1 . This evil no longer exists in U_2 since only t^*_4 is present in U_2 , and as such only t^*_4 exists in U_2 . Thus at $t^*_{\text{new-creation}}$ none of the prior evil performed in U_2 will exist either, for all that will exist in U_2 is $t^*_{\text{new-creation}}$, in which there is no evil. Presentist-Timelessness can solve the problem in the same way the divine temporalist can.

Not so Fast

However, things are a little more complicated on Presentist-Divine timelessness than I have thus far alluded to, and so more needs to be said. To do this, I'll focus on the model of the two presentist island universes, although something similar

²⁷ Elsewhere I argue that there are multiple different ways of spelling out a type of presentism which can allow for there to be multiple temporally unconnected presentist timelines (Page, manuscript b).

²⁸ I suspect the most fruitful way to object to this way of setting out the compatibility would be to argue that island universes are impossible, or the more restricted claim that presentist island universes are impossible. I, however, am yet to see a convincing argument for either claim.

will hold for those who postulate only one temporal present and additional timelessly existing entities. On this view we should notice that there is no single present simpliciter, something some have used to characterise presentism (e.g. Zimmerman, 2005, 431; Pooley 2013, 327).²⁹ For there are two presents, one in U1, and another in U2, where neither of these presents are temporally related to each other. As such there is no tensed simpliciter language which will apply to the whole possible world that we are considering, and as such tenses will be relativised to each island universe.³⁰ Thus something that is present in U1 will not be present in U2, since U2's present differs from that of U1, and likewise something present in U2 will not be present in U1, since U1's present differs from that of U2. This is just what is implied by island universes with presentist timelines.

However, there is more too. For if we take presentness and existence to be linked, such that "Something is temporal, and existence only plays the role of absolute temporal presentness" (Leftow, 2018, 175),³¹ then in addition to relativising the present to island universes, we will have to do the same with existence.³² Thus, just as when we talk of the present we will have to be more specific and speak of present_{U1} and present_{U2}, so we will need to qualify talk of temporal existence, resulting in exists_{U1} and exists_{U2}.³³ There is therefore no temporal existence simpliciter. Nonetheless, we can make use of a notion, namely EXISTS, to say something like "EXISTING in a time-series is existing, but not in that series" (Leftow, 2018, 185). This, however, will be a tenseless notion since the tenses of one timeline will not apply to the other.³⁴

²⁹ Zimmerman (2005, 431) seems to be worried that A-theories of time, of which presentism is a species, may have trouble distinguishing certain aspects from B-theories if they do not embrace the notion of present simpliciter. I show in (Page, *manuscript b*) that those who adopt multiple temporally unconnected presentist timelines can in still distinguish themselves from B-theories.

³⁰ This has some similarities to Fine's (2005, 278–280) notion of an external relativist view of tensed facts, but is different in that Fine thinks there is no unique present *within* a timeline, but an advocate of temporally unconnected timelines needs only to hold that there is no single unique present across both timelines, even if there is a unique present within each.

³¹ One can restrict this so it only applies to temporal entities and allows timeless entities as well (Leftow 2018, 175).

³² The route given here follows Leftow, but elsewhere I show that one does not have to go this route (Page, *manuscript b*). Crisp's version of presentism will not require the use of EXISTENCE and yet still gives the same broad picture.

³³ One may worry that this type of account requires that there are different kinds of existence, and thus one had better be an ontological pluralist if they wish to adopt it. This however would be a mistake. On this view, what it is to exist is tied to being present and the only reason we have different subscripted existences is because there are different presents in each timeline. Therefore, since there is no present simpliciter that ranges across all timelines, so too there is no existence simpliciter, even though it is still the case that for something to exist is for it to be present.

³⁴ For an argument as to why, see Leftow (2018, 188).

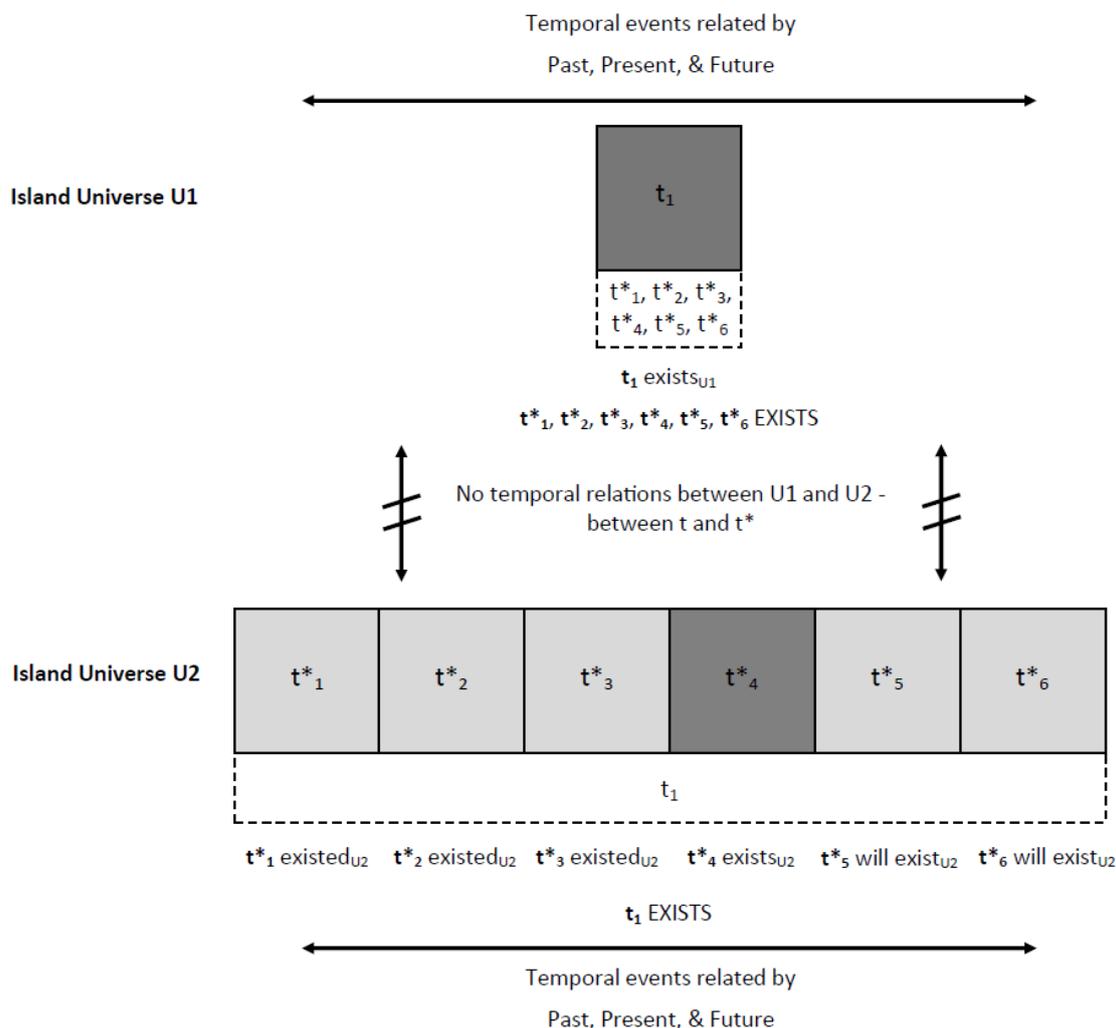
To see this more clearly let us think about what we should say if we found ourselves at time t_1 in island universe U1 and wanted to talk about time t^*_4 of U2. Time t_1 is present_{U1} and therefore exists_{U1}, but time t^*_4 isn't present_{U1}, but rather present_{U2}, and therefore doesn't exist_{U1} but exists_{U2}. But nothing in island universe U1 can be present_{U2} nor exist_{U2}. Nevertheless, we should be able to say something about the whole possible world, which includes U1 and U2, when in U1. Since the tenses of U1 can't apply to t^*_4 when we are in U1, and the tenses of U2 can't be used in U1 since they don't apply, we must employ a tenseless language and a tenseless notion of EXISTENCE. Hence within U1 we can say that t^*_4 EXISTS, with this signifying that t^*_4 exists but doesn't "exist" in the timeline we are currently considering. Our use of EXISTS, therefore, expresses tenseless facts about other timelines, in this case, that t^*_4 EXISTS in U1.³⁵

Let us now ask a further question about t^*_4 EXISTING in U1, namely whether it can begin or cease to EXIST in U1? Leftow claims it can't (2018, 187–188), and very briefly, here's why. One reason we might give for saying t^*_4 ceased to EXIST in U1 is because t^*_4 ceased to exist_{U2} in U2. But if t^*_4 ceased to EXIST in U1 when t^*_4 ceased to exist_{U2} in U2, it would look like the timelines weren't temporally unconnected. But they are temporally unconnected, and so t^*_4 cannot cease to EXIST in U1 for this reason. The alternative is to say that t^*_4 's ceasing to exist_{U2} in U2 doesn't in any way explain why t^*_4 would no longer EXIST in U1. But then it seems we are left with having to say that there's no reason why t^*_4 would cease to EXIST at one time rather than another in U1. Assuming we don't want insolvable mysteries, what we should say instead is that t^*_4 never begins or ceases to EXIST in U1. As such, t^*_4 always EXISTS in U1, no matter if t^*_4 is past, present or future in U2. Yet t^*_4 is not special in this regard, and much the same will be the case for all the other moments of time in U2, that is if they will be present at some point in W2, then they will never begin or cease to EXIST in U1. They all EXIST in U1 permanently.³⁶

³⁵ Much the same will be the case of the view which restricts presentism to only temporal entities, that is we will have some tenses appropriate of temporal entities but not timeless ones, and therefore tenseless ways of speaking will also be required. Thus, although we use the present tense to read a sentence like "2+2=4," many philosophically minded will say that when being precise, what we are really saying is "2+2=4" tenselessly.

³⁶ Additionally, note that since U1 is only one instant long, anything that EXISTS in U1 will permanently exist since there are no additional moments in U1 in which something could cease to EXIST.

If this is right, then we can draw a fuller diagram of the situation at hand:



Here we can see that in U1 only t_1 exists_{U1}, and that $t^*_1, t^*_2, t^*_3, t^*_4, t^*_5, t^*_6$ merely EXIST in U1, with this represented by them being placed in the dashed portion of t_1 . By contrast, in U2 only t^*_4 exists_{U2}, since $t^*_1, t^*_2,$ and t^*_3 all once existed_{U2}, but are now in the past and so no longer exist_{U2}, and t^*_5 and t^*_6 will come to exist_{U2} at some point in the future, but at present do not exist_{U2}. However, t_1 always EXISTS in the U2 timeline, and neither begins nor ceases to EXIST. Let me also make clear, so to avoid confusion, that despite the image making it appear as though, for example, t^*_1 exists twice, once in U1 and once in U2, it doesn't. t^*_1 "exists" only once, in namely U2. To put it another way, suppose a stabbing occurred in t^*_1 , the stabbing would only be happening to an individual in U2, they would not also be getting stabbed a second time in U1 as well. Yet this doesn't preclude t^*_1 and the stabbing EXISTING in U1, since this just tells us that t^*_1 EXISTS in a time-series, but not the one we are currently in. Additionally, one should not get the impression that t^*_1 and the stabbing EXIST in some type of abstract way in U1. It

does not, it is just as concrete as it is in U2. Perhaps the easiest way to think about this is to follow Leftow's suggestion that U2 will "look eternalist" (2018, 193) to U1, with all the time-slices EXISTING, it's just that U2 is in fact presentist, since in U2 only what is present_{U2} exists_{U2}.

Back to Presentist-Timelessness and Evil

The result of this complication is that all the time-slices of U2, what I'll call Creation, EXIST permanently in U1, that is God's eternity.³⁷ Nevertheless, we should remember the evil acts performed in Creation do not exist twice, but only once, in Creation. For instance, the stabbing exists at t^*_1 in Creation, but it does not exist when $t^*_{\text{new-creation}}$ is present in Creation. As such when the time is $t^*_{\text{new-creation}}$ in U1, we can say that there is no evil in Creation, even though all of the time-slices of Creation EXIST in God's eternity. Thus, evil is defeated if it requires evil to no longer *exist*, but it isn't defeated if it is required that evil no longer *exist and EXIST*. Yet, since the objection given is typically taken to be about the existence of evil in Creation, with Craig for instance writing, "creation is never really purged of evil on this view" (2001a, 66; 2001b, 214; Copan & Craig 2004, 162, n. 29),³⁸ the advocate of Presentist-Timelessness can say that on their account Creation is purged.³⁹ Additionally, the Presentist-Timelessness view allows that Creation can be renewed, such that the old creation will *exist* no more when the new creation is present, so answering a worry of Mullins (2014, 131; 2021a, 107). And finally, the view doesn't run counter to Peckham's claim that the Christian scriptures assure us that "the present evil state of affairs will pass away" (2021, 108). For on this view, the present evil in Creation will pass away when the new creation is present. Given this, I think defenders of Presentist-Timelessness can employ the presentist solution to defeating evil, *so long as* presentism itself can do the job.⁴⁰

³⁷ One might worry that creation would therefore become eternal on this view, a concern much like Mullins's (2021b, 92–94) creation objection to timelessness. Elsewhere I show it is a mistake to think this (Page, manuscript c).

³⁸ This is cited with approval by Mullins (2014, 131; 2021a, 107). Elsewhere Craig writes, "On an A theory of time, once the eschaton arrives, evil, being part of the past, disappears forever from creation, thanks to the objectivity of temporal becoming." (2008, 609)

³⁹ The advocate of Presentist-Timelessness might say that evil leaves a trace in some sense *beyond* Creation, in that it EXISTS in God's eternity. But it seems evil leaves some trace beyond Creation on most temporalist views too, in the sense that God perfectly recollects all the evil that has occurred in Creation.

⁴⁰ Note that Mullins (2014; 2021a) talks a lot about persistence and the need for endurantism to overcome the type of worries this article is addressing. As far as I can see nothing about Presentist-Timelessness rules out endurantism, and so an advocate of this position can adopt endurantism as well.

Does Presentism Really Do the Job?

But does presentism itself, irrespective of whether God is timeless or temporal, really do the job of making it the case that there is no evil in Creation? I'm not convinced that it does. To see this, think about the truthmaker objection to presentism which Armstrong sets out nicely when he writes, "[What] truthmaker can be provided for the truth <Caesar existed>? The obvious truthmaker, at least, is Caesar himself. But to allow Caesar as a truthmaker seems to allow reality to the past, contrary to [presentism]" (2004, 146). Assume now that you are like most presentists and feel the force of this worry, such that you think truthmakers need to be posited to account for these past facts.⁴¹ One suggested truthmaker, say of the past fact of X being murdered by Y in 1900, are Lucretian properties, namely something like the world instantiating the property 'having contained Y's murdering X in 1900'.⁴² This property exists and it will exist when the time in Creation is t^* _{new-creation}, and so too will other properties which also serve as the truthmakers for past evils.⁴³

Orilia, in a non-theological context, calls this the ugly truthmaker objection to presentism (2016, 233–235; 2018, 154–156), and provides the following response:⁴⁴

No matter how close the presentists' truthmakers are to the non-presentists' past events, only the latter involve, so to speak, the "real action." And it is only with the real action that there is, in the unfortunate cases, real suffering. (2018, 155; 2016, 234–235)

By "real suffering" it seems Orilia has in mind phenomenological pain/suffering, and so translating his response into the context of this paper, his reply is:

4. If X doesn't bring about some type of phenomenological pain/suffering then X isn't evil.

⁴¹ Rhoda (2009, 42) is an example of someone who claims that most presentists *have* and *should* feel the force of this worry and therefore posit truthmakers. Orilia (2018, 154) thinks the same, and thus raises this type of objection to his moral superiority argument in favour of presentism (2016, 230–238; 2018).

⁴² For a recent defence see (Tallant & Ingram 2020).

⁴³ If we are a Platonist, perhaps we can say it has EXISTENCE, but in that case we will be in the same situation as Presentist-Timelessness.

⁴⁴ Note, however, that the context in which Orilia asks and answers the objection is different, for Orilia is arguing against this objection in order to defend his view that presentism is morally superior to eternalism (2016, 230–238; 2018). Whereas the context here concerns whether presentism *alone* can make the case that some time-slice contains no evil whatsoever, even if there have been past evils. One can deny this latter claim, whilst also agreeing with Orilia that presentism is morally superior.

5. The truthmakers of past evils don't bring about phenomenological pain/suffering.
6. Therefore, the truthmakers of past evils aren't evil.

If this is right, then it seems presentism might in fact be able to do the job of removing all pain and suffering when the new creation is present despite the existence of these past truthmakers. But I don't think Orilia's reply is one that many theists will agree with. The main reason for this is that I doubt many will endorse (4), for I suggest most will think that there can be evils which do not bring about phenomenological pain/suffering. I certainly am not willing to endorse such a claim, for I think that even whilst under general anaesthetic, when I have no phenomenological awareness, one can still perform evils on me which I may never become aware of.

I suspect presentists should also disagree with this response from Orilia, since it seems that one should at least want to say past evils are evil. But in virtue of what does a presentist say that the brutal killing of some person in the past was evil? As Lebens and Goldschmidt write,

Presentists have to accept that what makes present evils bad is very different to what makes past evils bad. Present evils are bad because they're happening. Past evils, according to the presentist, are bad because, even though they're not happening, and they don't really exist, it's a bad thing for the present to instantiate certain sorts of backward-looking properties. That's an odd consequence of presentism. (2020, 376; 2017, 10)

If presentists don't say something like this, then they will have to say that *past evils* aren't in fact bad, and it was only in the present moment in which those evils occurred that they were bad. I take it that this will be too big a bullet to bite for most presentists. As such, for presentists the existence of a present truthmaker for this past evil or the present obtaining a fact of this past evil is lamentable and therefore bad or evil.⁴⁵ For on the presentist picture all that happens is that what *is* evil has "been relocated,"⁴⁶ namely from an event that is presently occurring, to the existence of something such as presently backward-looking truthmakers or facts. Given this, presentism alone will not make it the case that there is no evil

⁴⁵ My thanks to Brian Leftow for helping me see, through discussion, exactly what it is that is evil here, although I have since remembered that Lebens and Goldschmidt also made this point too (2017, 10; 2020, 375–376).

⁴⁶ I owe this terminology to Brian Leftow in personal correspondence.

in the new creation, as there will be truthmakers for past evils that occurred within creation.⁴⁷

Theists might also have reason to reject premise (5) of Orilla's response. For on a fairly popular view taken by divine temporalists, the divine memory plays the role of the truthmakers for past truths (Rhoda 2009; Zimmerman 2010, 801–806).⁴⁸ This alone won't get us to the denial of (5), but if one also rejects divine impassibility, with impassibility being a doctrine that Craig thinks is defended by very few on the contemporary scene (2011), then these existing divine memories may well cause pain and suffering to God just as they likely did when they were occurring.⁴⁹ This option is obviously not open for those who think God is timeless, since a timeless God does not have any memories, since nothing is past to Him. Yet defenders of timelessness might still deny (5) since passibility is compatible with timelessness,⁵⁰ and if what EXISTS in God's eternity can play the role of truthmaker for past truths within Creation, then perhaps what EXISTS in God's eternity means He eternally feels pain. As such an advocate of Presentist-Timelessness has the ability to deny (5) too.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Whilst I've focused here on Lucretian properties, I take it other such truthmakers would result in the same outcome. See Ingram and Tallant (2022) for some examples. One might wonder whether a privation theory would help respond to the concerns raised here. I'm unconvinced, but since I don't think that my interlocutors hold to a privation account I'll ignore that complication here.

⁴⁸ Note that those who object to (4) can claim that the evil here is relocated to God's memories, and then they need not go down the route of questions concerning passibility and impassibility.

⁴⁹ The ability of God to suffer in some way due to the actions of His creatures is exactly why impassibility is rejected by many. For an influential defence of this see Fiddes (1988), in which he writes, "The sorrow of God because his people reject his loving care leads to a unique kind of pain which is ascribed to God, a state of feeling which is characterized by the prophets as *a blend of love and wrath*. This is presented as a pathos which is God's own pathos." (1988, 20)

⁵⁰ To see this note that immutability does not entail impassibility, and so a timeless God who is immutable need not be impassable (Leftow, 2005, 59–66). Timelessness would only rule out impassibility *if* the way in which Creation externally affected God would result in God being temporally related to creation. It's far from clear that this must be the case.

⁵¹ Orilia does discuss another argument against his argument for presentism based on its moral superiority, namely the "ugly history" or "radical" objection, which holds that the moral value of a world does not just depend upon that which exists (2016, 235–238; 2018, 156–159). Whilst this is important given his context, it is not important here since, all this notion of defeat requires is that there is a time-slice in which there exists no evil, rather than us thinking about the moral status of a presentist world and all of its time-slices compared with an eternalist one. For even if the moral value of a presentist world was overall worse than an eternalist one, so long as there was some time-slice in the new creation which had no *existing* evil, evil would still be defeated on presentism and not on eternalism, since despite the eternalist world being more morally valuable overall, evil can still be said to exist. I admit that this does seem odd, and that if instead we define defeat in such a way that it is to do with the moral status of the world and its history then Orilia's response to this objection, and Graziani (2021) rebuttal becomes important. Note too that there is some reason to think that Philosophical Theologians should think that moral

The advocate of Presentist-Timelessness might wish to claim that their view is superior to the above divine temporalist position, since although both will admit that not all evil is completely gone, the evil is relegated to EXISTENCE within God's eternity in Presentist-Timelessness, whilst the divine temporalist, in virtue of thinking God exists within time, might have to say that Creation still contains evil in virtue of God finding Himself within Creation's timeline. Here I suggest the divine temporalist should reply that God's memories shouldn't be thought of as part of creation, and that they exist in metaphysical time and not the physical time of Creation (Padgett, 1992; DeWeese, 2004). If such a move is allowed it seems the divine temporalist will be in a similar situation to the advocate of Presentist-Timelessness in that evil no longer exists in Creation, but nevertheless still leaves a trace for God.

Perhaps it can be claimed that the notion of defeat we are working with should be weakened a little, so to remove even this trace. For it might be suggested the objection we are considering really just concerns evils not existing "as sturdily as ever at its various locations in space-time" (Craig 2001a, 66; 2001b, 214; 2008, 610; Copan & Craig 2004, 162, n. 29), and on this view, if the truthmakers of past evils are Platonic Lucretian properties, divine memories, or merely EXIST, then evil doesn't exist within Creation's space-time and therefore the relevant evils are defeated. Whilst I'm inclined to agree, it does seem some might think this move is a little *ad hoc*, since we have conveniently removed those evils we cannot eliminate from our definition of defeat. Maybe we can find some additional motivation for such a restriction, perhaps through scriptural data, but until we do, this type of move looks a little dubious.

So to avoid this, one might suggest another route for removing this trace of evil, namely by claiming that there are in fact no truthmakers for past-truths, and thus there are no presently existing truthmakers for any past evils.⁵² This move won't help the advocate of Presentist-Timelessness, for the evils in Creation still EXIST in eternity, but does it help the divine temporalist so that they can say that on their view in the new creation there is no evil whatsoever? I suspect that on most views it won't.

In order to see this it will first be helpful to note that I am assuming the temporal God we are considering is omniscient, and therefore will have a perfect memory of all past events.⁵³ If one wishes to hold, like Ward (2001, 107) that an

status of the world and its history is important, for the removal of certain parts of history is what Lebens and Goldschmidt (2017; 2020) attempt to accomplish in some of their work.

⁵² Craig (2017, 387–392) and Merricks (2007) are examples of people who hold there are no presently existing truthmakers for past truths.

⁵³ One might wonder whether human memory in the new creation will cause problems similar to those that I am about to pose, but I think it is much less obvious that humans must actively remember all past events, especially when compared with God.

omniscient God can ignore things or forget, or instead that God is not essentially omniscient given Kenotic theology (Davis 2006; Forrest 2000, 130–132), and so His knowledge does not include all past memories, then the argument I am about to make will not hold.⁵⁴ However, I'm not inclined to agree with either of these views, and take it that a perfect cognizer cannot be ignorant of the past and so will ignore this reply here.⁵⁵ Therefore, given God's omniscience, His memories of past evils will still exist in the new creation, even though now, since we are rejecting the need for presently existing truthmakers for past truths, these memories will no longer be truthmakers of those truths. I will also assume, along with many of my interlocutors (Mullins 2016, 202; Davis 1983, 4; Craig 2011; Ward 2001, 162–163; Peckham 2021, chap. 2), that God is passible, such that He can be emotionally moved by things, and that typically the types of emotions passibilists want to allow God to feel are negative ones such as pain, grief, etc.

With that as background, suppose that there are evils in Creation which were gratuitous.⁵⁶ I take it that when this evil occurred in Creation God knew about it and felt anguish over its occurrence, given omniscience and passibilism.⁵⁷ Yet I'm inclined to think that if God felt anguish over this evil when it occurred, then He will also feel some anguish over the memory of it in the new creation, for it is an evil that brought about no greater good. For it would seem odd if God stopped feeling anguish over this evil at some later point in His life, since nothing about the evilness of this evil seems to change, and no greater good comes of it. Yet since I think experiencing anguish can be considered an evil, for surely the world would be better if there was no such anguish, it turns out that there is evil at the present time of the new creation, namely God's present anguish over His memories of past gratuitous evils.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ One reason Ward (2001, 162) and Davis (2001, 107) might go this route is that they don't think evil should be permanently present to God, and whilst on divine timelessness it always is, on divine temporalism it won't, so long as God is not required to perfectly recollect the past.

⁵⁵ Craig, for instance, agrees writing, "it is logically impossible for God, being essentially omniscient, to forget what He experienced as present." (2001c, 39)

⁵⁶ Whilst I don't think this view is the majority position, there does seem to be a growing number of theists who think that gratuitous evils are compatible with theism, for instance, see: van Inwagen (2006, chap. 6), Howard-Snyder & Howard-Snyder (1999), Hasker (1992), and Mooney (2019).

⁵⁷ If one does not like the term anguish, substitute it for righteous anger (Psalm 7:11; Deuteronomy 9:22), hate (Proverbs 6:16; Psalm 11:5), grief (Genesis 6: 5–6), or sorrow (Mark 14:34).

⁵⁸ The fact that God experiences anguish does not mean that His overall emotional state is not one of joy. For I take it that one can have conflicting emotions at the same time, and with different strengths. One might also be able to run the problems I state here, although their force would seem weaker, on the view which takes God to be all happy, since the infinite happiness of God, although infinite is still decreased by anguish, such that God would be happier without it (Stenberg, 2019, 435–349). However, I cannot pursue this further here.

One might reply that there is a difference here between experiencing something as present and experiencing something as past, and that this might imply that God doesn't feel anguish when He experiences something as past, such as when He recollects the past. I find this very difficult to believe, since it seems obvious to me from experience that memories can bring about suffering. Perhaps it will be the case that experiencing something as past will typically bring about less suffering, but I think there will be suffering nonetheless and that the vividness with which one remembers the occurrence will likely have a bearing on how much suffering one feels when recalling it.⁵⁹ Yet since God's memory is perfect, He will recollect things as vividly as they possibly can be, and as a result I take it that He will experience close to the same levels of suffering as He experienced when the evil was present.⁶⁰

Another reply might instead claim that although God does not forget, perhaps He never chooses to recollect certain memories and therefore feels no anguish from them.⁶¹ However, I think that God's memories form a subset of God's knowledge and that God's knowledge is more perfect if it is always present to Him rather than requiring recollection. As such, I think God can and does hold all his memories within His present attention, with his infinite intellectual capabilities making this possible. Yet because of this, God will always feel anguish regarding the memory of this past gratuitous evil since this memory is always in His present attention.

A more obvious response is to claim that there are no gratuitous evils, and that therefore every evil in fact brings about some greater good. Thus, in the new creation God doesn't experience any anguish from memories concerning gratuitous evils. Sadly, I'm not convinced this will be sufficient either.

To see this first note that there are two different views concerning what type of greater good is required so to overcome gratuitous evils. On the first view the greater good just needs to benefit reality in some way (Mawson 2011), whilst on the second view it needs to benefit the individual who suffered the evil (Adams 1999, 28; Stump 2022, 5). Start with the former view and think about the following case. My daughter dies in some truly terrible way, and in virtue of this certain governmental policies are put in place which prevents any similar evil, which

⁵⁹ I say typically, because perhaps in some cases the memories of past evils might bring about more suffering as they are being remembered than when the evil was present, with this perhaps being the case in some trauma victims.

⁶⁰ That God's memory can act in this way is important for the divine temporalist since it is one of the ways to at least *weaken* an argument for timelessness, which is sometimes called the incompleteness of temporal life (Leftow, 1991, 278–279 – whilst Leftow formulates this argument, he doesn't name it this).

⁶¹ Perhaps this is why human memory is not an issue in the new creation, since they choose not to recollect, or maybe their finite intellectual capacities are so overcome by the joy of presently being with God that they don't have the intellectual capability to recall the past as well.

would have occurred, from occurring again. This is a great good, and it comes about due to my daughter's death, but it seems to me wrong to think that in virtue of this it is no longer proper for me to feel anguish over her death. This great evil happened to her, and she, after all, has not benefited from it. Anguish is what I will feel, and I think I should feel, even if the anguish is lessened by the knowledge that some great good has come about for the world in virtue of her death. I take it that the same will be true of God, namely that He will feel some anguish for His creatures that have suffered a great evil and who did not themselves receive any good from it and His memories of this occurrence too. This, I take to be consistent with God being justified in allowing the evil to take place so to bring about this great good, but it's just that God will suffer in some way in virtue of His memories of it.

What then about cases where the individual is the one who receives the great good? Think now about the following case. A woman is raped, a terrible evil, but in virtue of this becomes a mother to a child that she loves and devotes her life to, something she comes to think of as a great good.⁶² It still seems to me that even in this case, where the woman herself is the recipient of the great good, that she can feel anguish when she recalls the act of rape by which she fell pregnant and resulted in what she considers to be this great good. So too in God's case, He can feel anguish over His recollection of past evils, even though the person who experienced the evil has received a great good.⁶³ As before, I suspect the anguish will be of a greater severity than when the event is actually occurring, but it will be anguish nonetheless. So once again we will still have evil in the new creation in virtue of God's memories and thus the trace of evil is still not removed.

Perhaps, a defender of presentist-timelessness who also takes God to be passible can claim that they are in a better situation than the divine temporalist who thinks God is passible. To see this first note that we can think about our thinking, and think about thinking about our thinking, with this process being iterated. As such, God in the new creation can be thinking about all the evil that occurred in Creation, and then think about thinking about this evil and so on. I've suggested it's likely that God can feel anguish over all the evil that occurred in Creation, and I think God can also feel anguish when thinking about thinking about these evils, and so on. Perhaps at each iteration the level of anguish God feels will be less, but the level may never reach zero, and therefore at each

⁶² For an interesting case study which has *some* similarities to the case given here, see Kantengwa (2014).

⁶³ Note that I don't think saying that it was necessary that an evil occurred in order to bring about a great good will remove one's anguish here. For one can still feel sorrow or anguish that this is the case, and/or that someone still had to go through that experience.

iteration God feels some anguish.⁶⁴ Now I take it that a passible temporal God and a passible timeless God will both receive anguish from this in the same way. However, I think there is an additional way in which a temporal passible God can generate anguish, namely in virtue of His memories. Suppose then that it is now t'_2 in the new creation, God will have memories of thinking about the evils that occurred in Creation at t'_1 in the new creation, and memories of thinking about thinking about evil at t'_1 , etc. At t'_3 in the new creation God also gets a further iteration to do with memory, in that he now has memories of His thinking about the evils that occurred in Creation at the time t'_1 in the new creation, but also remembers remembering thinking about the evils that occurred in the new creation at t'_1 in the new creation at the time t'_2 in the new creation, and so on. Given this, as each new moment passes in the new creation God gets more and more memories, and more remembering's of remembering. Once more, perhaps we can say that each iteration of memory generates less anguish, but that it will nevertheless be the case that the anguish never converges on zero. As such, a temporal passible God has another place in which God accrues anguish compared to a timeless passible God, since a timeless passible God cannot accrue anguish in this way since He has no memory, and thus we might think a passible presentist-timeless God has less anguish overall and so should be preferred.

I suspect more details are required here but let me note one reply that a temporalist passibilist might make. They might say that although a timeless God doesn't get any anguish from memories, the anguish a temporal passible God feels about Creation when God exists at a time in the new creation will be less than a timeless God feels about Creation. The reason for this, so they say, is that for the temporal God the evils of Creation have passed, whereas for the timeless God they are permanently present, and that evils which are remembered cause less anguish than those evils which are in one's present.⁶⁵ The defender of divine timelessness, may reply along the following lines, claiming that we cannot speak of these evils as truly "present" to God, since the present of Creation and the present of eternity differ. As such the evils of Creation just occur to God, with this use of occurrence being tenseless. The question will then be whether the anguish one experiences from something "occurring" or being "present" is the same or different. If it is the same then the question will be whether the anguish a timeless passible God feels is the same in amount and/or intensity as that of a temporal passible God and His multitude of memories, or if it differs then we will want to know in what way it differs and why there is this difference. At

⁶⁴ If it did reach zero at some point we'd have to answer the question as to where God stops feeling anguish and the worry about arbitrary stopping points.

⁶⁵ This thought denies what was said in footnote 59, and it does seem inappropriate to compare God's emotional state to that of someone experiencing trauma.

present it doesn't seem obvious to me who will win out, or whether we'll be left with a tie.

In any case, it is clear from what I've said that I think there will be evil in the new creation if one takes God to be temporal and passible. The options at this stage, with us still assuming that there are no truthmakers for past truths, seem to be the following. First, admit the stain of evil never leaves the new creation *completely*, but that Creation itself is still purged, thus leaving one in a similar situation to presentist-timelessness or views where truthmakers for past truths are Platonic abstracta. Second, argue that the suffering God experiences in virtue of His memories isn't in fact evil and so although there is suffering there is no stain of evil in the new creation. If one can pull this off, then this would mean that divine temporalism is better off than a presentist-timeless God since the temporalist does not have to say that evil EXISTS. Or finally, the temporalist could say that God is impassible and so isn't moved by Creation, and as a result neither the evils that occurred in Creation nor the memories of them will cause God to suffer.⁶⁶ This too will result in divine temporalism being better off than presentist-timelessness since they do not need to affirm that evils EXIST, but I don't know of any divine temporalist who holds to impassibility.

The result of all this is that a presentist view of time, along with divine temporalism and a number of controversial views will provide the result that there is no evil in the new creation. However, the question will be whether this benefit outweighs the costs that such a view requires.

Summing Up

Although advocates of the argument we are addressing think the defeat of evil is accomplished by adopting presentism, I've argued here that this only seems to be the case if one adopts some additional and controversial assumptions.⁶⁷ Since many of these are far from popular, I suspect many will think that we should instead change our understanding of defeat, such that it does not require that

⁶⁶ Note that an advocate of Presentist-Timelessness can also reap some of the rewards of the impassibility move, since this will shield God from experiencing evil in virtue of what occurs in Creation and thinking about this occurrence. Nevertheless, evil will still EXIST in eternity.

⁶⁷ Let me also note a more general concern, namely that thinking an existing presentist time-slice in the new creation is just the wrong way of thinking about how evil is defeated. For it seems, at least given what the Bible says about God and the defeat of evil, that more needs to be done on God's part than merely create a new presentist time-slice. (For some further thoughts along these lines see: Lebens, forthcoming; Hollingsworth, forthcoming, 13–16). I suspect the correct response here is just to claim that presentism should merely be taken as a necessary condition of defeat, and that it is probably not the most important condition either.

there is *no* evil existing.⁶⁸ However, it might be the case that this redefinition means that Presentist-Timelessness does just as well as divine temporalist accounts, and/or may even leave the door open for eternalists to claim that evil can be defeated on their view of time.⁶⁹ If this is the case, then the argument will lose all its sting, but investigating whether it is will have to wait for another time. For now, we can conclude that the argument, as typically presented, is likely much less forceful against those who hold to presentist-timelessness, and that given the way defeat has been defined, most divine temporalists who adopt presentism, in virtue of their other commitments, cannot fully defeat evil either!

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⁶⁸ Another option may be to instead become "hyper-presentists," adopting Lebens and Goldschmidt's proposal (2017; 2020). However, I suspect defenders of this argument against timelessness won't like this either since "hyper-presentism" is significantly different from presentism, with some advocates of the argument having explicitly voiced their dislike of hypertimes (Mullins, manuscript; Craig, 2008, 599). Note also, that I think that even if an advocate of Presentist-Timelessness adopted "hyper-presentism," they would still have to think that evil EXISTS in God's eternity.

⁶⁹ Even if it does, a presentist could still run an argument like Orilia's (2016, 251–252; 2018, 160) which claims that God would have a good reason to prefer creating a presentist world because it is morally superior, and therefore if we think God has created we have additional reasons for thinking the metaphysics of time is presentist. The question will be whether this argument is successful, for some discussion see Graziani (2021), and even if it is, it will not rule out Presentist-Timelessness unless one can show that such a view is incoherent.

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