

The Transdimensional God: A Proposal Regarding God, Time, and Providence

by Steve W. Lemke

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

for the 2003 Southwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society

The issue of the relation of God and time touches upon almost every aspect of the doctrine of God, including the nature of God, divine providence, the problem of evil, God's intervention in history, and miracles. For many years the relation of God and time was relegated to something of a tertiary issue in theological discussions, with relatively few books published by evangelicals on the subject. However, partly in response to issues raised by freewill theism, evangelical theologians have rediscovered how foundational and crucial the relation of God and time is to a well-constructed doctrine of God. The relation of God and time has become a topic of renewed interest in the past few years, highlighted by the publication of a number of new books in the field. It becomes clear in these recent publications, however, that there is no evangelical consensus on any single perspective on God and time, and it appears unlikely that any consensus will emerge in the near future.¹ Terrance Tiessen in his book *Providence and Prayer*² has outlined eleven different positions on divine providence, each of which has a corresponding view of God and time. Within evangelical theology, however, the discussion has primarily polarized between Arminian/Openness theologians who place God within time and Calvinist/Classical theologians who place God totally outside of time. The purpose of this paper is to propose a possible mediating solution to the relation of God and time to help us get our hands around this issue. I am proposing a "transdimensionality" model to describe God's relation to the created world of time and space.

Any such proposal about God and time must attempt to answer at least the following crucial questions:

- (a) What is the nature of time?
- (b) What is the nature of God with respect to time?
- (c) How does God relate to time in divine providence?

¹ Gregory E. Ganssle, ed. *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

² Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000. For a more thorough examination of Tiessen, see Steve Lemke, "God's Relation to the World: Terrance Tiessen's Proposal on Providence and Prayer," delivered at the 2002 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, available at <http://nobts.edu/faculty22/slemke/Tiessen.htm>, or an e-mail copy is available through <http://www.zondervanchurchsource.com/clip/convention/schedule.htm>. For a book review, see Steve Lemke, review of *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?*, by Terrance Tiessen, in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2002):114-118.

The Nature of Time

Grasping clearly the meaning of time is obviously propaedeutic to any meaningful discussion of the relation of God and time. Time is a primitive notion that is difficult to define without utilizing temporal terms. As William Lane Craig notes, “time cannot be analyzed in terms of non-temporal concepts.”³

The New Testament utilizes two primary words in relation to time, *chronos* and *kairos*. The *chronos* concept relates to the actual chronological measurement of duration, while *kairos* focuses on the meaning or significance of time (Matt.26:18, Luke 13:56). The contrast between the meaning of these two words is illustrated in Titus 1:2-3, in which the promises of God were made “long ago” (*chronos*) but were manifested at the proper time (*kairos*). The interaction of God with the physical world is placed in a human temporal framework in the *chronos* concept, while the timing of God’s providential intervention in history pertains more to the *kairos* concept. Although some Bible passages point to the cyclical patterns of nature, the primary metanarrative of Scripture is a linear view of history with a beginning, middle, and end (creation, redemption, and consummation). In this linear perspective of time, of course, the *arrow of time* is locked in the direction of the future.

A distinction is sometimes drawn between the objective and subjective perspectives on time. The *objective* dimension of time focuses on time as real, unmetered duration. Although we know from Einsteinian physics that no human measurement of time is absolute, “objective” time is metered with means external to human perspectives. The *subjective* view of time is from an internal human perspective, in which time may seem to drag by at some times and race by at other times, even though these perceptions may not be confirmed by external measuring devices.

In a fascinating book entitled *Dimensions of Time: The Structures of the Time of Humans, of the World, and of God*, Wolfgang Achtner, Stefan Kunz, and Thomas Walter⁴ propose the thesis that the human consciousness of time has a tri-polar structure of endogenous, exogenous, and transcendent time. *Endogenous time* refers to the forms of time that arise from inward experience, particularly the biological rhythms of life. *Exogenous time* occurs as humans interact with their environment, and is evidenced in both natural time (the cyclical patterns of nature often expressed in the mythology and cultic ceremonies of various religious traditions) and social time (frameworks of time established within a society or culture to help it structure its activities). In particular, the invention of the clock in the thirteenth century revolutionized Western culture by providing a rational, linear measurement of time by which society could be organized, meeting times could be established, and work could be compensated. *Transcendent*

³ William Lane Craig, *God and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 13.

⁴ Wolfgang Achtner, Stefan Kunz, and Thomas Walter. *Dimensions of Time: The Structures of the Time of Humans, of the World, and of God*, trans. Arthur H. Williams, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

time is the sense of timelessness that arises from mystical experience, prophetic foreshadowing, and epaphanic revelation. This threefold pattern of evolving human consciousness has the feel of a Hegelian dialectic, although the authors do not claim to use this Hegelian methodology.

Another helpful distinction is customarily drawn between time as actual duration and our human measurements of time. Isaac Newton identified *duration* as the actual sequential nature of events, which is “true, absolute, and mathematical,” and *metric time* as the human measure of time that is “relative, apparent, and common time.”⁵ While Newtonian physics understood the limitations of human measurements, it understood actual duration as being absolute. The Einsteinian physics came to understand time as relative to speed and a point of reference within the timespace continuum, and thus not absolute. However, even in the Einsteinian physics it is only the quantity of time that is variable according to inertial frames of reference; the comparative relation of time remains constant (i.e., longer, shorter, before, after).

Henri Bergson drew a distinction that is similar but different from Newton’s, between real duration and mathematical time. *Real duration* (time itself) is continually flowing without measurement, while *mathematical time* is a human construct or heuristic fiction visualizing time as a number of points along a time line. *Metric conventionalism* holds that all human measures of time are arbitrary, and that no such thing as absolute time exists. Newton was aware, of course, that clocks occasionally produced incorrect measures of time. But the very fact that we correct our clocks underscores the common intuition that time has an inherent metric that is objective and absolute.⁶

Perhaps the most significant distinction about the nature of time was proposed by J. M. E. McTaggart,⁷ who distinguished the “A theory” and the “B theory” of time. In the “A theory” of time (also known as the “tensed” or “dynamic” view of time), the present is given a privileged position such that the present or “now” exists a way that the past and future do not. Advocates of the “A theory” of time usually advocate some variety of divine temporality, in which God’s acts are within the flow of time and reflect temporal succession. In the “B theory” of time (also known as the “stasis” or “tenseless” theory), the past, present, and future are known primarily through their relationship with other events. The past is designated as past because it is “before” other events, and the future is what it is because it is “after” other events. Advocates of the “B theory” of time tend to advocate divine timelessness, in which God experiences past, present, and future events all at once in an “eternal now.”

⁵ Isaac Newton, *Principia*, trans. I. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 408.

⁶ William Lane Craig, “Response to Alan G. Padgett,” in *God and Time*, ed.. Ganssle, 117-118.

⁷ J. M. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), chapter 33.

The Nature of God in Relation to Time

Grappling with the issue of God and time is made more difficult by the limitations of human language. This struggle to stretch human language to describe adequately God's infinite qualities is a challenge in all theological endeavors, particularly in areas dealing with the divine nature. Efforts to avoid imposing temporal references to God are stymied by use of such traditional (and meaningful) theological terms as "foreknowledge" or "preexistence." The intention of these words is to place God outside the flow of time, but the temporal indexes "fore" and "pre" have the opposite effect of placing Him within time. Again, human language is so temporally saturated that we have no adequate language to express the situation of being outside the timespace continuum.

Theologically, there is something not unlike a Euthyphro problem regarding the relation of God and time. Which is prior, God or time? Is time what it is because it is a reflection of an aspect of the nature of God, or is time simply a phenomenon of the created world? Scripture speaks of God as being a God of order (Gen. 1:1-5, John 1:1-4, 1 Cor. 14:33, 40), but also clearly identifies Him as the Creator of time (Gen 1:14-18). If time is merely an aspect of the created order, is it true, as the old gospel hymn asserts, that when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound that "time shall be no more"?

With respect to the doctrine of God, the key question is whether God is in or out of time. The two poles of thought are temporalist and atemporalist notions of God's nature. *Temporalist* notions of God place Him within the flow of sequential events, while *atemporalist* theories of God place Him outside of time in the "eternal now."

Atemporalism

The traditional Christian perspective is *atemporalism* or *eternalism*, which asserts that God is timeless. Held by Augustine, Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, and Paul Helm, atemporalism holds that it is misleading to say that God knows things "ahead of time" or "in advance" because to do so would place Him within the stream of time, making Him another temporal being subject to time. God knows everything simultaneously in the "eternal now" or "eternal present." God is a simple unity, not divisible into time and space; and thus He does not have temporal location or temporal duration. From this perspective, God's relation to time is illustrated by analogies such as the center of a circle being equidistant from all points on the circle; an author or film director's perspective compared with that of the reader or viewer; or the perspective of someone on a mountain compared with that of people along a road beneath the mountain. The atemporalism of thinkers such as Paul Helm is inextricably bound to the doctrines of divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility. From this perspective, God would not be God if he were to "experience" time or change.

Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann have proposed a model of atemporalism which maintains God's atemporality but also allows Him to intervene providentially in time. God exists in the "timeless now" or in "timeless simultaneity" which is characterized by

ET-simultaneity (i.e., the eternal and temporal take place simultaneously).⁸ They do not understand these terms to be understood literally but rather as relating metaphorically to temporal duration or simultaneity. Their suggestion is that God is atemporalist in His nature, but His actions can be dated from a human perspective in metric time. In defense of this thesis, Stump and Kretzmann provide the account of Aleph, a linear possible world that is merely single dimensional, i.e., only differentiated by “ahead” or “behind.” Monica, however, lives outside the Alephian world, and can see all along the Alephian time line. In a similar way, say Stump and Kretzmann, God can see the entire dimension of human linear time.⁹ Brian Leftow has proposed a similar but different model of eternal duration as “quasi-temporal eternity” (QTE), in which all events are seen through God’s frame of reference in timeless eternity.¹⁰

Mediating Views: Omnitemporalism, Relative Timelessness, Metatemporalism

Several theologians and philosophers have proposed mediating positions between divine temporalism and atemporalism. William Lane Craig has proposed a novel mediating approach that he has labeled *omnitemporality*.¹¹ Craig agrees that God is best described as atemporal “before” or without God as creation, but He is temporalist after creation with a dynamic perspective on time.

Alan Padgett advocates the *relative timelessness* perspective in which God exists in a timeless eternity that flows from His being, but God can nonetheless respond to the temporal world.¹² God’s timelessness is relative to the measurable time of this space-time universe, but is temporal relative to the metaphysical time that flows from His nature. In Padgett’s model, God is timeless with regard to physical time but temporal with relation to metaphysical time (of which He is the ground, and which imposes no limits on Him).

⁸ Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981), 429-458; reprinted in *The Concept of God*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 219-252, and Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity, Awareness, and Action,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (October 1992), 463-482.

⁹ Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity, Awareness, and Action,” 470-473.

¹⁰ Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 225-226, 234-235.

¹¹ William Lane Craig, “Timelessness and Omnitemporality,” in *God and Time*, ed. Ganssle, 129-186. Interestingly enough, Clark Pinnock proposes essentially the same view as Craig’s perspective: “The really important thing to say is that at least from the moment of creation, God enters into temporal relations with his creatures. One might speculate that God is timeless without creation and temporal subsequent to creation.” Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 98.

¹² Alan G. Padgett, “Eternity as Relative Timelessness,” in *God and Time*, ed. Ganssle, 92-128.

Jack Cottrell has proposed a similar view that he labels *metatemporalism*.¹³ In Cottrell's model, God is *tempontological*, that is, God's "very essence is temporal; time is an attribute of his being . . ."¹⁴ God is temporal in His essence both prior to creation and in His transcendence. Cottrell thus rejects Craig's proposal that God was atemporal before creation. But Cottrell does not fully endorse a robust temporalist account because "God is temporal, but he is not *merely* temporal. He is *metatemporal*. He both exists in time, *and* transcends time."¹⁵ God transcends created time, which is finite, but is within eternal time or metatime, which is infinite. A strange corollary of Cottrell's proposal is that God does not have eternal foreknowledge, but is in fact oblivious of the actual universe until He experiences an expansion of knowledge that Cottrell calls a "noetic big bang."¹⁶

Temporalism/Sempiternalism

A number of thinkers have described God as temporal, everlasting, sempiternal, or temporally eternal, including Samuel Clarke, Jonathan Edwards, Nelson Pike, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Peter Geach, J. R. Lucas, George Schlesinger, William Hasker, Richard Swinburne, William Rowe, and Amos Yong.¹⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff has advocated *unqualified divine temporality* with a corresponding tensed, dynamic, or "A theory" of time.¹⁸ In this perspective, God is temporally eternal — infinite in duration and unbounded by the past and the future. The God of Scripture is intimately involved in time through creation, providence, and the incarnation. Timelessness arises from Greek philosophy, not the God of Scripture. Most Openness of God theologians assert that it is not meaningful to talk of God knowing the future because the future does not yet exist to be known.

¹³ Jack Cottrell, "Understanding God: God and Time," a paper delivered at the 2002 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Toronto, available at <http://www.cincybible.edu/seminary/academics/facpublications/Cottrell.pdf>. This view differs from his previously published views on foreknowledge.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Ibid, 9-12.

¹⁷ Amos Yong, "Time and Eternity, Divine (Fore)knowledge and Creaturely Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Issues," available online at <http://www.bethel.edu/~ayong/OriginalForeknowledgePaper.doc>

¹⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Unqualified Divine Temporality," in *God and Time*, ed. Ganssle, 187-238.

Critique

Each of these models cite biblical references that can be read as consistent with their perspective, but the biblical evidence alone is not so clear or precise as to decide the issue decisively. The biblical language of God as “eternal” or “everlasting” (1 Chr. 16:34-36; Ps. 44:13, 90:1-4, 93:2, 103:17; Isa 57:15; Heb. 1:10-12, 13:8) is claimed by both sides as support for their respective positions. Both sides affirm the biblical language that God was preexistent before the creation of the world (Gen. 1:1, Ps. 55:19, 139:16; Prov. 8:22-23; John 1:1-4, 8:58, 17:24; Col. 1:16-17). To determine the better of these two approaches, a judgment must be made on the basis of broader biblical and theological themes.

Likewise, it is difficult to separate these positions merely by appeal to logic. Each of these perspectives are presented by erudite thinkers who develop careful, logical arguments on behalf of that perspective. In the end, it may be intuitive judgments and personal commitments which determine each person’s evaluation of these issues.

While I am attracted to many aspects of the atemporalist perspective, I am aware of its limitations, particularly as it has been advocated by Perfect Being theologians and by Paul Helm. The version of atemporalism that Paul Helm advocates is burdened with an overly rigid view of divine immutability and impassibility. Helm’s extreme views result in at least the following four unhappy logical consequences, none of which are necessary to atemporalism:

- (a) *Temporal Indexicals and Omnipotence* – Helm is willing to give up a high view of divine omnipotence because in his view God cannot know indexical measures of time or distinguish what events are currently happening. A plain reading of Scripture would not appear to be consistent with Helm’s denial of a robust view of God’s omnipotence.
- (b) *God as Personal and Providential* – Helm asserts that God does not actually relate to persons in time, but falsely represents Himself as doing so in ways that are not literally true. This false self-representation of God is inconsistent with the revealed nature of God in Scripture, particularly His personal nature, not to mention His holiness and righteousness. Such a God would be incapable of genuinely responding to prayer or being personally available to those who would worship Him.
- (c) *Creation ex nihilo* – Helm denies creation of the world and time *ex nihilo*, proposing instead the possibility of the eternity of the universe. I agree with William Lane Craig that this is a subbiblical view of creation.
- (d) *Christology* – Helm has theological problems related to a proper view of the incarnation and the Trinity which arise from his assertions that “[T]here was no time when the eternal God was not Jesus of Nazareth” and “[T]here is no time in which the Son of God exists in

a preincarnate form.”¹⁹ It would take a longer discussion to respond to these claims, but I believe that Helm’s Christology is defective at several points.

The liability of imposing immutability and impassibility on the doctrine of God as Helm and some Perfect Being theologians present them is that it places constraints on the freedom and sovereignty of God. God seems to be depicted as a preprogrammed computer rather than a personal Being capable of free action. The intent of these theologies, of course, is exactly the opposite – to separate God from the mundane characteristics of the physical world. There are significant scriptural reasons for rejecting impassibility; indeed, to endorse such a position one must reinterpret as anthropomorphisms numerous scriptural passages that explicitly describe God as expressing emotion. In fact, however, theologians who endorse impassibility tend to arrive at the doctrine more as the result of a logical construction than from biblical exegesis. There is more scriptural evidence for immutability than for impassibility, but these can be read as affirming that God is unchanging in His nature. He is not a “god in a box” who is as unresponsive as Baal was to his prophets on Mount Carmel. He is a personal Being who is responsive to the various actions of His free creatures. Perhaps the best way of communicating this dimension of God’s nature is to refer to it, as Millard Erickson labels it, the “constancy” of God.²⁰ This language retains the personality and freedom of God without sacrificing His consistency and faithfulness.

Beyond problems of immutability and impassibility, atemporalist approaches are difficult to square with a robust affirmation of the incarnation. The Word that became flesh in Jesus Christ breaks all the rules for Perfect Beings. Assuming that one affirms that Jesus was fully divine during His incarnation, the reality of a doctrine as important as the incarnation is powerful counterevidence to the claims of Perfect Being theology.

My disagreement with temporalist approaches, including the mediating views of Craig, Padgett, and Cottrell which include strong temporalist notions, is their portrayal of God as being circumscribed by time. If God were circumscribed by time, it would seem that He would be limited by space and the other dimensions as well, and would thus not truly be God in the perfection described in Scripture. God is the Creator of time and space, not the product of time and space. Even Craig’s proposal that God is temporal after creation suggests that God somehow changes in His nature or essence after creation. God might appear to change from a human perspective, but not from the perspective of eternity.

¹⁹ Paul Helm, “Divine Timeless Eternity,” in *God and Time*, ed. Ganssle, 54, 55. See also Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

²⁰ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 278-281.

A Transdimensional Account of Time, the Nature of God, and Providence

I am proposing the term *transdimensionality* to describe God's relation to the created world.. What I hope to convey by this term is that God in His essence is timeless, not subject to any of the temporal or spatial limitations of the four dimensional world that He created (apart from the voluntary *kenosis* of some of these qualities in the incarnation of Jesus Christ). God is the Author of dimensions, not subject to them. He can enter into dimensions, as He did in various epiphanies and most clearly in the incarnation. But this entrance is as the Owner of the vineyard, not as a slave. The owner of the vineyard might be in the "far country," but can return to the vineyard He dug at any point in time (Matt. 21:33-41). Transdimensionality suggests that God is beyond time but is no stranger to time. He is *omnitemporal* – not in the sense that Craig used it, but in parallel with the other qualities of God's transdimensionality, including His omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. Just as by affirming God's omnipresence we do not mean that God is entirely located in any particular physical space, so God's omnitemporality does not imply that He is located at any point in time. But an omnitemporal, omnipresent God can be anywhere at anytime. The world dwells in the "B theory" of time, but God sees time from a perspective of eternity. While this transdimensional/omnitemporal approach is on the atemporalist side of the spectrum, it nonetheless attempts to avoid some of the problems posed by immutability and impassibility by some accounts, especially those associated with Perfect Being theology.

It is almost impossible for humans to imagine what it would be like to be transdimensional, because every aspect of our perception is guided and bounded by the dimensions of time and space. Every human analogy of God, though it may speak an important truth about God, has its limitations. Human analogies tend to break down particularly as they attempt to describe God's essence, because He is *sui generis*. To be one of a kind necessitates by definition that one be unlike anything or anyone else. It is thus rather unfruitful to speculate about what God's experience of time might be like. As difficult as it might be to imagine what the experience of another created being with different perceptual apparatus (such as a bat) might be,²¹ to grasp God's experience would be even more difficult because it is qualitatively different. His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

Nonetheless, we can only use creaturely analogies to communicate ideas, so I will propose an admittedly flawed analogy. When we travel, particularly international travel which crosses a number of time zones or even the international date line, we find time being metered by a different standard than we are accustomed. We may choose not to change our watches, perhaps to remind us of what time it is at home, and our bodies may not adjust to the new time zone for several days – the well-known jet lag effect. In a creaturely way, we may insist on "seeing" time from the perspective of the Central Time Zone, even if in Romania the same time is measured eight hours later. Likewise, God lives "outside" our time zone, indeed outside of time itself. But He can "synchronize" His activity with ours.

²¹ Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," in *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, ed. Ned Block (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 1:159-168.

I am largely in agreement with the thrust of Stump and Kretzmann's proposal in which God possesses a distinctive and eternal simultaneity in relation to time. Like Monica who sees all of Aleph in a single glance because she is not limited to Aleph's single dimension, God is not limited by our four dimensional world. The "ET-simultaneity" concept has been roundly criticized by a number of philosophers as incoherent and explanatorily vacuous,²² however, Stump and Kretzmann have modified their proposal in such a way as to avoid many of these criticisms.²³ There may still be some useful refinements that could be made to their language, such as Padgett's suggestion that they use the nomenclature of "timeless coexistence" in order to avoid the confusion with more temporally laden terminology.²⁴

This may be a case, however, that the critics are wrong. The authors who contribute to this literature are analytic philosophers of some ilk who propose logical arguments in support of their positions. They criticize Stump and Kretzmann for utilizing temporal terms in reference to eternity and for misapplying the concept of "frame of reference" in Einstein's Theory of Relativity. It may be that a flaw in the approach of many thinkers to this subject is that they share the presupposition that the answer to the relation of God and time is comprehensible, following the laws of human logic and science. But to do so seems to put God in a box – to expect to apply the laws of logic and science to God in a precise and uniformitarian fashion. God is not illogical, but neither does He conform neatly to human rules and concepts.

But is the intersection of God and nature not precisely where we should expect to see such an aberration? Are not many of our most cherished theological affirmations about the nature of God expressed as a paradox or a tension – such as the concursive action of God in inspiring human authors to write the Bible as a divine-human book, the paradoxical way that God

²² All four of the contributors to *God and Time*, ed. Ganssse, criticized Stump and Kretzmann – Paul Helm (36-37, 111, 161), Alan Padgett (94-95, 99-101), William Lane Craig (141-145), and Nicholas Wolterstorff (171). More extensive criticisms are voiced by Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 20; Paul Fitzgerald, "Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985), 260-269; Helm, *Eternal God*, 32-33; William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 164-166; Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 170-171; Delmas Lewis, "Eternity, Time and Tenselessness," *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1988), 72-86; and "Eternity Again: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15 (1984):74-76; Herbert Nelson, "Time(s), Eternity, and Duration," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 22 (1987), 3-19; Katherin A. Rogers, "Eternity Has No Duration," *Religious Studies* 30 (March 1994), 1-16, reprinted in Katherin A. Rogers, *An Anselmian Approach to God and Creation*, Studies in the History of Philosophy, vol. 44 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1997); and John C. Yates, *The Timelessness of God* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 128-130.

²³ See Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald," *The Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987), 214-219; and especially their "Eternity, Awareness, and Action."

²⁴ Padgett, "Relative Timelessness," in *God and Time*, ed. Ganssse, 94-95.

sovereignly ordains and yet also allows human participation to be meaningful, and ultimately in the Savior who was both God and man? God in His omnipotence is both immanent and transcendent. God in his omniscience has exhaustive foreknowledge without causally limiting human freedom. God in His omnipotence is capable of controlling all things and yet allows sinful rebellion to occur with silence. God in his omnibenevolence loves all people, and yet allows evil and suffering. So why should we be amazed that there would be what appears to human logic to be an aberration about the topic of God's relation to time? One is always in danger of making a category mistake when applying scientific principles or rules of human logic rigidly in dealing with the nature of a God who is *sui generis*. Perhaps the answer to God's relation to time is a mystery bound up in the eternity of God that can only be affirmed by faith. We are not left totally in the dark, however, because Scripture does present us with some information about God's nature.

Transdimensionality, then, affirms God as the Creator of time and the Lord of time. He is a God of order, and thus time is consistent with His nature and flows from His nature. God is not timebound, however. It is even somewhat misleading to speak of God as existing in metatime, infinite time, or absolute time (as do Newton, Craig, and Cottrell) except as a metaphor, because time is uniquely associated with the timespace continuum that is our universe. Time had a beginning at creation, and it will have an end in the eschaton.

We in Western culture tend to view time in a linear perspective, in which time is a tough taskmaster, a bomb with a ticking clock. In the last minutes of a close basketball game, each shot and each defensive move makes a great deal of difference. In the world of the Spirit, the problem with sin and the law is ultimately time – i.e., the clock is ticking and the end is coming. If we saw time in the cyclical pattern of the Hindus – the endless cycle of *samsara* – it wouldn't matter if we were behind by 100 points in that basketball game, there would still be plenty of time to change things. Religiously speaking, we would have all eternity to come to the truth. But in eternity, time loses this immense significance. If we don't do it today, we can do it a thousand years from now, because a day truly will be like a thousand years. So applying temporal terms to eternity and to God is a category mistake. From God's perspective in eternity, time has lost its sting (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

God exists in eternity in a way that mysteriously coexists synchronously with time from a human perspective. Just as the children in C. S. Lewis's classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* go in and out of the wardrobe into Narnia, so God can “go in and out of time” (the quotations denote metaphorical language). The “window” or “door” through which He “goes in and out of time” is a mystery, but Scripture gives us sufficient evidence that God actually and genuinely interacts with His creatures. Like the Alephians, we are one dimensional people locked in the forward gear of the arrow of time. But God has the perspective of eternity, and thus He sees in ways that are not accessible to us.

God can “see” the future from His perspective in eternity, and thus He has exhaustive foreknowledge of the future events of free persons. Part of God's omniscience includes Molinist middle knowledge and knowledge of counterfactuals, but this is essentially surplus knowledge because He also knows what actual choices his creatures with libertarian freewill will make.

Foreknowledge is noetic rather than causal; He does not normally force or compel human choices. I am affirming what Paul Helm calls *O-foreknowledge*, the view that God can know an event ahead of time without bringing it about, not *A-foreknowledge*, in which God foreknows by virtue of the fact that He has ordained or ensured that the event will come to place.²⁵

Like a child who is playing with a large toy train set layout – moving cars, fixing parts, adding new things to the scene, and picking up after disasters – God is “above” or “beyond” our world, but can step into our world at any moment. Based on His exhaustive foreknowledge, God intervenes regularly in human affairs. God is free and sovereign, but He chooses to allow persons to exercise a limited libertarian freewill.²⁶ God is real and personal, accessible through prayer, upholding the created world and time through His providential care, and intervening in history at kairotic moments.

²⁵ Tiessen, 252.

²⁶ My approach to action theory is in essential agreement with a chastened libertarian freedom model advocated by Hugh McCann, in which deliberation yields decision and intention formation, which in turn leads to execution of intention. From his voluntarist perspective, “Intentions do frequently accord with strongest desires, and they frequently accord with judgments of what is best. The problem is, however, that strongest desire and best judgment may be out of accord with each other, and then intention can go either way.” McCann, “Intrinsic Intentionality,” *Theory and Decision* 20 (1986), 252. McCann warns against the reductionism of causally deterministic accounts of action that “do not allow for independent mental states of intending, but rather seek to reduce intention to other states, often a combination of desire and belief which, when they cause behavior of an appropriate kind, are held to issue in an intentional action.” McCann, “Intrinsic Intentionality,” 247. For more on the McCannian model of action theory, see also his *The Works of Agency: On Human Action, Will, and Freedom* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1998); “Rationality and the Range of Intention,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 10 (1986), 191-211; “Settled Objectives and Rational Constraints,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (January 1991), 25-36; “Volition and Basic Action,” *The Philosophical Review* 83 (October 1974), 451-473; and “Trying, Paralysis, and Volition,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 28, no. 3 (March 1975), 423-442.

Nozick’s analogy of legal precedents resonates well with what we find to be true phenomenologically:

The weights of reasons are inchoate until the decision. The decision need not bestow exact quantities, though, only make some reasons come to outweigh others The bestowed weights . . . set up a framework within which we make future decisions, not eternal but one we tentatively are committed to. The process of decision fixes the weights reasons are to have. The situation resembles that of precedents within a legal system; an earlier decision is not simply ignored though it may be overturned for reason. Robert Nozick, “Choice and Indeterminism,” in *Agents, Causes, and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 103.

In the final analysis, what distinguishes various views of providence is where to assign the role of mystery. Semi-deists try to eliminate mystery. Freewill theists and process theologians remove mystery from divine foreknowledge, and place it in the future instead. A Molinist middle knowledge advocate can affirm but not explain how an omniscient God could have exhaustive foreknowledge of what creatures with libertarian freedom will do. How divine election and human freewill can work concurrently is bound up in the mystery of divine omniscience. Calvinist approaches remove this mystery, however, by affirming that humans do not have libertarian freedom. God decrees and predestines everything, and thus there is no mystery in dealing with human freewill. But because they cannot account for why a loving God would decree such extensive and gratuitous evil, Calvinists such as Tiessen must say that God's character and purposes are mysterious and unknowable. While we cannot know God's purposes exhaustively, it is precisely the character and purposes of God that are revealed most clearly not only in Scripture, but ultimately in the life of Jesus Christ. So we should not place the mystery in God's purposes or character, but we should recognize mystery when God's omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omnitemporality intersect this finite world.