



KNOWING THE END FROM THE BEGINNING

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ABSTRACT: There is an objection posed against Brian Leftow's conception of a timeless God which claims that God cannot know the temporal order of events, with Craig going so far as to assert that on Leftow's view God's life will be chaotic. If this objection is right then Leftow's God cannot know the end from the beginning. This paper sets out the objection, describing how it arises from Leftow's Anselmian view of God's relationship to Creation and then shows several ways in which the objection can be overcome. Much of this centres around discussions of the direction of time and how Leftow's God could know this direction. The paper then concludes by noting that what has come before can be modified so that other conceptions of divine timelessness can also explain how God knows the temporal order of Creation's events.

KEYWORDS: Timelessness; Omniscience; Brian Leftow; Direction of time.

Introduction¹

There is an objection posed against Brian Leftow's conception of a timeless God which claims that God cannot know the temporal order of events (De Florio and Frigero, 2019, p. 238; DeWeese, 2004, pp. 173-174; Craig, 2001a, pp. 102-106; Mullins, 2016, p. 153, n.93), with Craig going so far as to assert that on Leftow's view God's life will be chaotic (2001a, p. 105).² If this objection is right then Leftow's God cannot know the end from the beginning. This paper, however, argues that Leftow can overcome this objection in various ways.

¹ I wish to thank Alex Pruss, Brian Leftow, and James Read for discussing this topic with me, with their insights no doubt making this paper better than it would have otherwise been!

² Note that the primary context in which Mullins raises this concern does not concern Leftow (2016, p. 153) although he does also pose it to Leftow in a footnote (2016, p. 153, n.93).

Leftow's Timeless God

Leftow takes God to be timeless.³ God is therefore said to have no temporal relations intrinsic to His life, and no temporal relations within anything extrinsic to Himself, namely Creation.⁴ God's life therefore, is not characterised by bits of it being earlier or later than other bits, and neither is His life earlier, later, or simultaneous with any aspect of Creation.⁵ This much is typical for defenders of divine timelessness. What is less typical, and what is said to cause the issue this paper is concerned with, is Leftow's view as to how events in Creation relate to God's timeless life, eternity.

Leftow proposes an Anselmian answer to this (1991), holding, seemingly contrary to what I've just said, that all of Creation's events are simultaneous with God's eternity. However, Creation's events are simultaneous with God's life *only* insofar as these events have an eternal dimension and therefore can be said to exist in eternity. Insofar as these events are temporal, in virtue of having a temporal dimension and existing in time, these events are not simultaneous with God's eternity. Using an analogy of a co-ordinate system, Leftow's (1991, p. 213-216) thought is that whereas God's eternity has just an eternal co-ordinate, Creation's events have *both* temporal *and* eternal co-ordinates. Yet since God and Creation share an eternal co-ordinate, God is simultaneous with Creation in this sense, even though He is not simultaneous, or in any way temporally related to Creation's temporal co-ordinates. There is much more that could be said about this view, but this is all we need in order to construct the supposed problem for Leftow.⁶

A life of chaos

The thought which generates the worry against Leftow's view is that in virtue of Creation's events existing in their eternal co-ordinate, they must no longer have any of their temporal relations within this co-ordinate. Their relations of earlier than and later than, which they have in their temporal co-ordinates, have disappeared, since nothing can be earlier or later within eternity. As such all of Creation's events are simultaneous within eternity. But given this, we might wonder, as De Florio and Frigerio do, "how God can know that the death of Caesar precedes the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. [For] In the timeless frame, these two events obtain at once and it is not possible to determine which precedes which." (2019, p. 238; DeWeese, 2004, pp. 173-174) The concern therefore is that Creation's events have lost their chronology within eternity, and as such, we might say, along with Craig, that all of Creation's events "are chaotically co-existent" (2001a, p. 105) in eternity with God having no way to ascertain how they are temporally ordered.

³ Elsewhere I provide an overview of Leftow's view on God's relationship to time (Page, 2024).

⁴ Here I am assuming that Creation ranges over everything other than God, which is something I suggest Leftow would endorse (2012, Introduction).

⁵ Leftow does allow that God has some "typically temporal properties" (2002), such as having a present, namely an eternal present, with this being a present that never changes or moves. But since this complication doesn't affect what is to come in any way, meaning that one can endorse or ignore it if they wish, I shall ignore it here.

⁶ Once again, I direct the reader to (Page, 2024) for further explication.

This then is the challenge, namely how does Leftow's God know the chronology of events in eternity, namely whether events are temporally earlier, later, or simultaneous with each other, given that eternity itself precludes any temporal relations.⁷

A Leftowian Response

Here is one way Leftow could respond. On his Anselmian view, an entity exists both in eternity *and* in time.⁸ The entity itself *does not* exist twice, as some have thought (Rogers, 2020, p. 315, n.23), but exists wholly in time and eternity, not having just a part in one and another part in the other. As such, if the entity has properties, such as "being earlier than Y within Creation's timeline", then the entity also has this property within eternity, for it has all the properties it has, *relevantly specified*, in both eternity and time, for it is one and the same entity which exists within the two dimensions of time and eternity. God, therefore, just needs to know that the entity has these properties, and in virtue of this He can know that the entity in question is temporally ordered in such and such a way within time, even though within eternity the entity exists simultaneously with all other entities and so exhibits no temporal relations within eternity. Given this, whilst it is true that there is no temporal order within eternity, the entity in question does not lose the temporal properties it has within time. This is all just part of what the Leftowian Anselm view claims. One might not like the picture, but it's incorrect to think that the temporal properties the event has within time are lost within eternity.

Nevertheless, it seems that Leftow would like to go further and claim that Creation's events, existing in eternity, somehow encode the temporal-order information such that God can work out the temporal order of events from this alone.⁹ The question, therefore, is whether this can be done and how God represents this temporal order within eternity. It is to this we now turn.

An instructive failure

An obvious starting place comes from noticing that temporal events have dates and that if these events exist in eternity then they will also retain these dates within the eternal co-ordinate. Those who hold that God is timeless standardly think that God can have knowledge of these dates (Leftow, 1991, p. 327; Helm, 2010, p. 80; Sorajbi, 1983, pp. 258-259), but we might wonder how He comes to know them. Whilst now isn't the time to provide a full account of the mechanisms of omniscience, and it's not clear that I could do so or even need to do so, I merely note that Leftow allows that God can gain knowledge in a multitude of ways, such as through *something like*

⁷ Note that this objection is just concerned with B-relational truths, not the question as to whether a timeless God can know A-relational truths, which is a distinct objection to timelessness and requires a distinct response.

⁸ I use entity to try and signify an extremely broad ontological category, and so to include events.

⁹ Leftow has confirmed this to me in personal correspondence, but his talk of atemporal analogues/timeless of B-series (1991, pp. 240-241) point to this as well.

observation (1991, pp. 219-222), intuitive insight (1991, pp. 318-319), and in virtue of being the creator (1991, pp. 260-266).¹⁰ Perhaps we could therefore say that it is in virtue of being Creator that God knows the dates of these events, since God is both creator of Creation's events in their temporal co-ordinates and also in their eternal co-ordinate. For as Creation's events are contingent in all co-ordinates they require God's creative action.¹¹ Suppose then that the temporal events of Creation are dated as follows: t_1, t_2, t_3 , etc. In virtue of this there is a type of order between events, namely a *numerical order*. Yet there seems to be no reason why events couldn't be ordered this way in eternity even though they occur simultaneously in the eternal co-ordinate. Creation's events could therefore be ordered numerically in eternity, with the question now becoming whether God could recover the *temporal order*, namely the earlier than, later than, and simultaneous relations which occur in time, from this numerical order.

Sadly, the answer to this is no. For numbers are not objectively one way directional, and can be ordered in the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. direction or the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 direction (McTaggart, 1908, p. 462; Baron & Miller, 2019, p. 11). By contrast, earlier-than and later-than relations require a one-way objective directionality. As such, if God only had access to the numerical order of dates and we supposed that the Big Bang and Big Crunch were at the opposite ends of our dated series, God wouldn't know if the Bang or Crunch was at the beginning or end of the temporal order. This is not ideal!

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that the numerical order is of no help to us, for based on this ordering we get a "betweenness" relation that can hold between Creation's events in eternity which corresponds to the temporal ordering of events. That is in virtue of the numerical order, all of Creation's events in eternity become correctly placed *between* the other events within the series; for instance, t_3 is always between t_2 and t_4 , and t_5 is always between t_6 and t_4 , etc. All that is missing, therefore, is the information regarding which way God should read the numerical series so that it fully represents the temporal order of Creation's events. That is, whether should we read these ordered events from, $t_1, t_2, t_3 \dots$ or $\dots t_3, t_2, t_1$? Searching for an answer to this will therefore concern most of what follows.

Before doing so let me also note that ordering the events numerically also provides God with a way of representing the temporal order of Creation within His life. That is, God can represent the temporal order numerically, by ordering the events of Creation in terms of their dates, so long as He has the additional knowledge as to which direction they are meant to be "read". This doesn't require any succession or temporal relations within the divine life, and therefore provides God with an "atemporal analogue" of the temporal order. Once again all we need is to work out a way for God to retrieve this information.

Yet there might already be a couple of worries based on what I have said which need addressing before we proceed. The first is that I've been speaking of a dated order and in doing so have appeared to presuppose that there is an absolute dated order. This might be thought of as problematic since relativity theory is often taken to have removed a privileged foliation and therefore absolute dates. Given this, my proposal

¹⁰ I don't mean to suggest that Leftow would think this list exhaustive, and neither do I.

¹¹ It is true, however, that Creation's events in eternity do not require God's sustaining action, since they do not exist for a series of moments, as eternity contains no succession.

might be thought of as a non-starter. There are, however, several things one might say in response. Firstly, within the context of this paper, most of those who have raised the worry I am addressing are A-theorists (i.e. Craig, 2001a; Mullins, 2016; DeWeese, 2004) and as such take there to be an absolute present, and a privileged foliation giving rise to absolute dates.¹² As such, I do not think that they would object to absolute dating. Be that as it may, relativity might be thought to pose a threat to these theorists too. However, one might argue that relativity theory is compatible with a privileged foliation. For instance, special relativity need not conflict with such a foliation if one interprets it in a neo-Lorentzian fashion (Craig, 2001b), and/or adds additional structure to the theory (Zimmerman, 2011). General relativity can also be made consistent with a privileged foliation of space-time, such as in the FLRW solution to general relativity where people appeal to cosmic time (Swinburne, 2008).¹³ Yet given this, it is too quick to suggest that talk of absolute dates is impermissible given relativity theory without further argument.

Nevertheless, I think we can adjust my view concerning dates for those who think there is no privileged foliation, and hence no absolute dating to events. On this view, the dates of events will differ depending upon different frames of reference, since some events will be simultaneous in some frames and not in others. If we momentarily put aside how God could gain all this information from the events of Creation that exist in eternity, what we require is for God to know the dating of events in distinct frames of reference. The ontology of time that is typically assumed in this context is that of a block theory, where all events exist, and from a theistic perspective these events will have their existence due to the causal action of God.¹⁴ One can then adopt either a substantialist view, where space-time is a container like substance, or a relationalist ontology, where space-time concerns the relations between objects.¹⁵ Assuming a substantialist view of space-time, we could claim that God's causal role in generating and sustaining space-time gives Him the knowledge of what is at that point in space-time.¹⁶ God can also know the truths associated with relativity theory, such as the law of light, Lorentz transformations, etc. in virtue of being the creator of Creation. Yet in light of this information, God can determine that for a certain reference frame with specific space-time coordinates, the order of events will be thus and so relative to that frame of reference.¹⁷ Therefore, given God's knowledge of the different space-time

¹² Leftow might adopt absolute dates, since he is attracted to presentism (2002, p. 43, n.6), but he also speaks as though he endorses the non-absolutist view of dates too (1991, pp. 354, 239, n.19).

¹³ For a good critical discussion concerning how persuasive the arguments from general relativity against A-theory are, see (Read & Qureshi-Hurst, 2021). Also see Crisp (2008) for more widespread discussion of presentism and relativity theory.

¹⁴ There are obviously questions to be answered as to how a timeless God can cause space-time, but this I take to be a distinct concern for defenders of timelessness, and not one I can address here.

¹⁵ Whilst I'll assume substantialism, I suspect one can get a similar story to work on relationalism.

¹⁶ There is more for God to know given general relativity, but I'm not sure there is anything extra that is needed which means a timeless God would be precluded from knowing it.

¹⁷ In presentations where relativity theory is set up in terms of knowledge of geometry and performing certain calculations on this, such as in Maudlin's work (2012), it seems to me as though there is no reason why God couldn't do the same. He may not Himself be timelike separated from events in time, but He will have knowledge of those spacetime points in virtue of being their creator and therefore still will have knowledge of the relevant factors of the reference frame to work out the dating of events.

coordinates and the relevant mathematics, He is able to work out a dated order of all events that are time-like separated from any particular frame of reference.¹⁸ Unfortunately, this too doesn't provide us with a temporal ordering of events, but merely gives us a *betweenness* ordering of events, since it could be true that despite the events being ordered there is no temporal direction.¹⁹

But how will this amendment work on Leftow's view where the events that exist in eternity somehow encode the temporal order? First note that for Leftow, if an item has parts within time it has them within eternity (1991, p. 237). Therefore, if an entity is four-dimensionally extended, and has temporal parts within time, it also has these parts within eternity too, albeit simultaneously in eternity.²⁰ Temporal parts, however, as Balashov (2000) has argued, sound very much as though they assume an absolute conception of time and dates. Nevertheless, Balashov suggests that we can say that objects have time-like parts:

Each time-like part of a perduring object belongs to a certain 3-plane of simultaneity in a given reference frame, which is orthogonal (in the sense of orthogonality pertinent to Minkowski space-time) to the time axis in that frame. In this respect, a time-like part is a direct descendant of the classical temporal part: the former becomes *like* the latter when we restrict our attention to a particular frame. (Balshov, 2000, pp. 331-332)²¹

The thought, then, is that we have a four-dimensional entity with time-like parts that exists within eternity, where the time's we are referring to correspond to non-absolute datings, rather than something that brings with it earlier-than, later-than, and simultaneous with temporal relations, since Balashov's theory is compatible with there being no such relations. God, therefore, has all the ontology He needs of Creation's events within eternity so to know what the dated order of events would be given different reference frames. But as before, we only have God knowing all the betweenness relations between dates and not the additional content of which order to read these numerical orders such that it represents the temporal orders.²² How then does Leftow's God gain this vital knowledge?

¹⁸ Note that we won't here get an ordering of events that are space-like separated from one another, since according to relativity theory there is no such answer as to the temporal relationship between space-like events.

¹⁹ This will be discussed a little more in the following section.

²⁰ Despite Leftow's frequent talk of parts, I don't take him to be committed to perdurantism, as he seems open to endurantism as well (1991, pp. 191-192), and talk of parts is something that three-dimensionalists can arguably employ (Hawthorne, 2006, ch.5).

²¹ For more details on this view of temporal parts I refer the reader to Balashov's paper.

²² Note that for the remainder of the paper I will speak as though there are absolute dates, albeit whilst noting that what I go on to say I think can be translated for those who do not take such a view.

Temporal order? What temporal order?

Perhaps we can avoid having to answer this question, after all what is it that allows us to say that time has a one-way order? It is the thought that there is an objective direction or arrow to time, and that in virtue of this some events *are* objectively earlier or later than others. That there is a temporal order, by which I mean at least an ordering of B-relations (earlier-than, later-than, simultaneous-with), is something I've so far presupposed. But one might question whether we should think time is one-way directional, just as McTaggart (1908) did. For it may turn out that there aren't in fact objective relations of earlier and later within time, and that time has no objective direction or arrow. This is a view endorsed by several philosophers, with Price contending that to think there is an objective temporal direction is a theoretical dead end (2011, p. 304).

However, if that's right, then the fact that God doesn't know which direction to "read" the order of dates is perfectly harmless, for there is in fact no objective temporal direction and so no objectively correct way to "read" their order. As such, on this view it would be true that God didn't know that Caesar temporally *precedes* the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, since there is in fact no objective fact of Caesar temporally *preceding* Napoleon. As such, the numerical order Creation's events in eternity misses out nothing of the order of Creation's events in time, since there is no extra knowledge to be had.²³

Yet, I suspect that many will find this view difficult to swallow. After all, it sure seems to *prima facie* appear as though time has a direction and many temporally asymmetric phenomena may lead us to think this as well. Yet appearances can be deceiving, and time may be like space in more ways than first thought, with it too only having a subjective direction like up and down. Additionally, we should remember that many think temporal asymmetry doesn't imply a temporal direction, for as Horwich says:

It could be that the two opposite directions along the temporal dimension are significantly different from one another, even though neither has the metaphysically special status of being the direction 'in which time goes'. Thus, we should be open to the idea that time is anisotropic, despite having no *privileged* direction. (Horwich, 1987, p. 37)²⁴

²³ McTaggart (1908) thought temporal events were ordered in terms of a C-series, which he took to be a timeless order. But it is probably better to think of this as an ordering of C-relations, which is a type of undirected asymmetric ordering relations (Baron & Miller, 2019, p. 11; Farr, 2020).

²⁴ There are a few different notions here which Baron and Miller define nicely (2019, pp. 121-124). Thus, something is "temporally asymmetric if the behaviour of that process or phenomenon is different along one direction on the temporal axis than along the other direction on that axis." (2019, p. 122) A "dimension (such as time) is *anisotropic* if it has different properties along one direction of the dimension as compared to the opposite direction of the dimension." (2019, p. 122) And "time has a direction just in case time is anisotropic (either intrinsically or extrinsically) *and there is some fact of the matter* (given by the world) as to which direction is which." (2019, p. 124 - italics my own)

However, one might have a theological objection to this proposal, for it might seem that God has providentially ordered events in a particular temporal direction and given this view, there is in fact no temporal order. Craig would seem to be one who would object in this way given that he writes, “As the doctrine of the last things, eschatology is an inherently temporal notion. It deals with the history of mankind and the universe in the *later than* direction.” (2008, p. 602) The response I think one should offer here is that causal asymmetry is enough to account for all the *essential* theological content that one needs to endorse. Sure, one would need to rethink how to understand what eschatology deals with, namely that which is causally consequent rather than that which is in the temporally later direction. But if all the theological content one needs to endorse can be accounted for in this way, then this doesn’t seem a huge cost.²⁵

Knowing the end from the beginning

Let us therefore assume for the remainder of the paper that there is an objective direction to time. What then is it that constitutes time’s direction? One type of answer says it is primitive and intrinsic to time itself (a non-reductive answer), whilst the other holds that it is reduced to or grounded in some asymmetric phenomena (a reductive answer).²⁶ Note also that asymmetric phenomena which are appealed to in reductive answers can likewise play a role in non-reductive answers, namely through *allowing us to infer* that time has an intrinsic direction and *what that direction is*.²⁷ Since I shall assume this is the case, I won’t make much use of the distinction between reductive and non-reductive answers, as what I’m concerned with is whether Leftow’s God can have knowledge both of what the phenomena is that reveals the direction of time, and what direction that phenomena reveals time to have.

How then might one account for the direction of time? Many answers have been proposed with each focusing on different asymmetric phenomena. Here I run through several suggestions which I claim would provide Leftow’s God with knowledge of time’s direction.

Thermodynamics

Several theorists have contended that time’s direction is related to thermodynamic phenomena, often focusing on entropy (e.g. North, 2011). The thought is that in virtue of knowing facts about entropy increase across events, one can know time’s direction. As far as I can tell, if this is right, it is something Leftow’s God could know. That is, God could know that entropy increase in some way discloses time’s direction, since this itself isn’t a temporal fact, and what the entropy state of all the timeslices of Creation is, with all of these existing in eternity. God could garner this knowledge in

²⁵ Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess whether one can in fact account for all the theological data that one would need to in this way.

²⁶ For a nice introduction see Baron and Miller (2019, pp. 130-131).

²⁷ For instance, North (2011, pp. 342-343) suggests this about thermodynamics.

virtue of being the creator of each timeslice, both in time and eternity, and then given this knowledge could work out that the Big Bang, due to being in a lower entropy state than the Big Crunch, should be taken as the beginning of the numerical dated order so to accurately represent the temporal order of events. In light of this, God knows all He needs to in order to represent the temporal order of Creation's events with eternity.²⁸

*Causation*²⁹

Another suggestion is derived from the *predominant* order of creaturely causation (e.g. Pruss, 2011, pp. 47-52; Mellor, 2009, pp. 454-457),³⁰ with causes taken to *typically* temporally precede their effects.³¹ Again, as far as I can tell, if this is a fact about causation it isn't one that requires one to be temporal in order to know, and as such it seems like knowledge Leftow's timeless God could have.³² God will also know all the asymmetric causal relations that hold in Creation, since these causal relations will be retained within eternity. These causal relations will be simultaneous,³³ as they exist in eternity, yet still asymmetric, and God will know them in virtue of Him playing some type of a role in all creaturely causes, including those in eternity.³⁴ But given all this, God can know that if there is an event with a particular date that has an asymmetric causal relation to another date, that the event which has the cause within it will be temporally prior to the event which has the effect within it in time. As such God can once again infer from Creation's events in eternity what their temporal order is.

²⁸ Note also that God could just order the events in eternity in terms of their entropy increase instead of their dates, and in virtue of knowing that this order divulges the direction of time, He would be able to represent the temporal order of events within eternity.

²⁹ One reviewer raises the question as to whether the former proposal, thermodynamics, is parasitic on and/or reducible to the proposal based on causation. This is a good question and one I leave to philosophers of physics to answer. I merely follow the literature in keeping them as separate.

³⁰ Counterfactual views of causation are also sometimes appealed to for explaining time's direction (e.g. Lewis, 1979). Another option might be that God knows the causal laws which are time reversal asymmetric, such as those concerning the weak force, and then infer the direction of time through this. For discussion of the weak force being time reversal asymmetric as well as scepticism regarding asymmetric laws of nature being a sufficient condition for time's anisotropy see (Gołosz, 2017).

³¹ I speak of "creaturely" causation so as to exclude the causation of a timeless God. And the "*predominant* direction of causation" is referred to, so to allow for simultaneous and backward causation in Creation.

³² If all creaturely causes temporally preceded their effects it might be even easier for God to know, especially if it was *essential* to *temporal* causes that they precede their effects.

³³ Obviously if one thought it impossible that cause and effect be simultaneous, as Mullins seems to (2020, pp. 224, 231-232), then this would be a non-starter. But this seems to me a too strong a position to take concerning causation, even if we allow simultaneous causation to be a special case (Paul & Hall, 2013, p. 67) and won't be something defenders of timelessness would be on board with.

³⁴ Whether God's action is occasionalist, concurrentist, or mere conservationist, I suggest this will be enough to give Him the knowledge of the causal links within Creation.

Additional Presently Existing Truthmakers

Another suggestion is more niche and available to those who hold to a presentist theory of time,³⁵ the finitude of the past, the discreteness of time, and the truthmaker theory to account for past truths, and that there are no truthmakers for future truths within any particular timeslice.³⁶ If one adopts these views, then if God knows that the temporal order is such that later times have more truthmakers than earlier times, which seems to be something that is possible for Leftow's God to know, then God could know the temporal order in virtue of identifying the number of truthmakers that are within each existing timeslice in eternity, with the later direction containing more truthmakers than the earlier.³⁷ Given this we have yet another way in which Leftow's God could know the temporal order of events.³⁸

³⁵ Some think that timelessness and presentism are incompatible (Craig, 2001a, pp. 139, 282; Mullins, 2016) and therefore this proposal will be a non-starter. One reason for this, given by a reviewer who agrees they are incompatible, states that presentism's objective present and the dynamicity of the present will carry over into a timeless God's perspective which implies that God is temporal. It's beyond this paper to respond to this fully, but note that Leftow (2018; see also: Page, 2023) implicitly responds to this concern elsewhere by first defining presentism and then showing how it is compatible with divine timelessness. Let me also add that if what the reviewer says is right then I think this will lead to a significant metaphysical cost for presentism and so speak against this way of formulating it (Ingram, 2019, p. 18; Deasy, 2017, p. 381), since it will rule out the possibility of multiple temporally unconnected presentist timelines (or presentist island universes). As I think there are some good arguments for the possibility of such timelines (Baron & Tallant, 2016, pp. 591-605; Bricker, 2020, pp. 111-116; Skow, 2022, pp. 282-283), I think it would be better if presentism could be formulated so to allow for this possibility rather than rule it out. Given that there have been various ways in which presentism has been formulated in the literature, something nicely documented by Tallant and Ingram (2021), and as there seems to be little by way of consensus as to how it should be formulated, it may well be that a theory which is *appropriately* called "presentism" can allow for multiple temporally unconnected presentist timelines, and elsewhere I have attempted to show how three different presentist theories can be adjusted so to allow for this possibility (Page, manuscript). However, if there is such a theory, the issue the reviewer raises will be bypassed, since it won't be the case that what time it is "now" is objective across all timelines, even if it is objective to each timeline, for there will be no universal "now" which covers all timelines given that they are temporally unconnected. This also parallels the traditional understanding of divine timelessness, where an eternal absolute present was said to exist alongside, but not temporally connected to, an absolute temporal present (assuming a presentist reading of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas). Nonetheless, the reviewer, and others, might think this impossible or that an *appropriately* formulated presentism allows for only one absolute present. Supposing they are right then I concede that it is likely that this response will be a non-starter for advocates of divine timelessness, unless they can understand the eternal present as not really being a "present".

³⁶ See (Ingram & Tallant, 2018, sec. 6.1) for some examples of these types of truthmakers. I'm not totally sure whether Leftow himself would endorse all of these, although I think he would endorse many.

³⁷ Supposing instead that the truthmakers are just long conjunctive properties, then the direction would be based on the number of conjuncts.

³⁸ This view also gives us an additional way in which God could represent the temporal order, namely atemporally representing it in terms of events which have increasing numbers of truth-makers.

Time's Flow

Whilst there might be other options which reveal the direction of time that Leftow's God could know to thereby gain the information He needs to correctly read the dated order of Creation's events in eternity, there is at least one explanation of time's direction that seems unknowable for Leftow's God, with this account holding that time's direction is known by the direction of time's flow. Since nothing flows or changes for a timeless God, as eternity lacks succession, it seems God cannot know time's direction in virtue of its flow.³⁹ Thus, if we suppose that the objective direction of time is *only* known through knowledge of time's flow, then Leftow's God couldn't know the objective direction of time's flow. Nevertheless, Leftow's God could perhaps still know what created-agents take the direction of time to be.⁴⁰ One way in which He could do this stems from His knowledge that memories require something to be in one's past, since one doesn't remember an event if it's yet to happen or if it is currently occurring.⁴¹ Given this knowledge, God can ascertain what is the correct way to "read" the eternal dated order of events so that they represent the temporal order, since He knows that if a created agent has a memory, what they are having a memory of will have occurred in a temporally earlier slice.⁴² God could therefore know that given an agent's subjective perception of time, according to them at least, Caesar precedes Napoleon. What's more, I take it that God could be aware as to how every agent orders events based on their subjective apprehension of the temporal order, with all events in God's life ordered accordingly.⁴³ So although on this view it's true that God lacks knowledge of the *objective* temporal order, given that we are assuming this isn't something that is possibly knowable for Leftow's God, one may not be all that

³⁹ Perhaps if God possessed omnisubjectivity He would know this, but omnisubjectivity is not endorsed by all and might pose issues for timelessness. For some discussion see Zagzebski (2023).

⁴⁰ Note that it would be a mistake to think that a timeless God would have to "wait" until there are created-agents in order to work out which way to read the dated order. For a timeless God does not "wait" and on Leftow's view all of Creation's events exist in eternity. Further, in working out that one dated event will be temporally earlier than another, God will be able to work out the temporal ordering of all events since all we are requiring that He needs to learn, given the dated order, is the way to read this order that correctly represents the temporal order of Creation's events.

⁴¹ One might wonder whether God work out which events in eternity contain memories. As memories seem like a distinct mental state, it seems likely that they require different mental goings on than other mental states. But there seems no reason why God couldn't know this, and therefore it seems possible for God to work out which of all the simultaneously existing events in eternity contain memories. God could work out what were memories from events that simultaneously existed in eternity.

⁴² A question that is more relevant to this proposal is whether God could identify when agents were having faulty memories, such that He did not infer what order to "read" the dated events based on faulty memories. Whilst I suspect God could know whether a creature's faculties are working properly so as to ascertain whether their memory was faulty, one can also reply that in virtue of God creating creatures He knows that their memories are *generally* reliable, and so can come to know the order to "read" the events in virtue of the *predominant* direction of memory.

⁴³ I take it, therefore, that God can order the events in His life in multiple ways in His eternity, just as we are able to order various things in various ways at once even if only in our minds.

concerned about it,⁴⁴ especially as God knows how each agent perceives the order of events.

A non-chaotic life

In light of all of this, I think there are plenty of ways in which Leftow's God could come to know the temporal order of events in virtue of their existence within eternity. Each of the options above seem possible and given this the more pressing question is whether there is an objective direction to time, and if any of the suggestions I have made concerning how time's direction is revealed to us are persuasive. This I shall leave for my readers to determine.⁴⁵ Note too that it seems entirely possible for Leftow's God to *represent* such an order within His life without their actually being temporal relations within His life, as I have noted.⁴⁶ Furthermore, there seems no reason why God couldn't represent multiple different dated orders within His infinite mind simultaneously were there to be no absolute dated order, all without confusion. We finite creatures seem able to order things within our minds in multiple different

⁴⁴ As Leftow notes, we call God omnipotent even though there are things He cannot possibly do, and so we may call God omniscient even if there are things He cannot possibly know (1991, pp. 321-327).

⁴⁵ I suspect those best qualified to do this will be ones with very good knowledge of physics and philosophy, since it is those skills which are required in order to determine the answer to the questions just posed. Nonetheless, if none of these options do the job, then as a reviewer nicely points out, all God needs to do is "pack enough temporal structure into Creation so that, when viewed from God's eternal perspective, an objective temporal ordering is discernible", with this perhaps being done in such a way that the extra additional structure is only discernible to God.

⁴⁶ Some objectors to Leftow seem to worry that he has B-relations existing in eternity (Deng, 2019, pp. 27-28; De Florio & Frigerio, 2019, p. 239). Supposing that's true, then I agree that this is a mistake *if* it also requires that there is succession in eternity. If that is the case then one should just say there are no B-relations within eternity, but that B-relation information can be recovered from what exists in eternity. Note, however, that Leftow does sketch out a view where things can be earlier or later in God's life without there being any succession. To do this he suggests eternity is thought of as a type of extended duration, what he calls Quasi-Temporal Eternality (QTE) (1991, ch.6), and then suggests that an eternal thing may have many different mental acts at earlier and later eternal locations, even though they enjoy all these mental acts in one and the same eternal now (1991, p. 146). The best way I see of making sense of this is to first note that eternal duration is taken to be a temporal parallel of an extended material simple, being an extended temporal simple (Leftow, 1991, pp. 137-143). With this parallel in mind, note that some advocates of extended material simples, although by no means all, have contended that it is possible to make sense of these simples as exhibiting qualitative variation (Gilmore, 2018, sec. 5.5). If that's right, then perhaps a parallel move can be made regarding an extended temporal simple, namely Leftow's QTE, where the events in God's life can be said to be "earlier" or "later" than others in virtue of where they occur in QTE, namely the one and only permanent eternal extended temporal simple. Obviously if one thinks extended material simples exhibiting qualitative variation makes no sense, as many do, they will unlikely be convinced by this parallel, and it may well be that the parallel I've suggested doesn't hold given the differences between space and time or perhaps in virtue of some other difficulties with the temporal simple case that don't beset the material simple case. Nevertheless, developing the parallel case further seems to me the best way to make sense on Leftow's idea. However, one does not have to go this route and can instead retreat to the move I made above, and since Leftow doesn't *actually* endorse an extended duration view of eternity (QTE), even though he thinks it defensible (Leftow, 1991, pp. 4; 267; 290, n.11), he may wish to do just that.

ways, and so it doesn't seem an impossibility for a perfect mind to do this to an even greater extent.⁴⁷ Leftow's God, therefore, can know the end from the beginning.

A wider application

Let me conclude by noting that the response I've given in this paper need not be restricted to Leftow's view alone, for not everyone who thinks God is timeless thinks that Creation's events also occur simultaneously with eternity. For instance Stump and Kretzmann think "events really occur sequentially in time and also all at once for God, *though they do not really occur at once*" (Leftow, 1991, p. 332 – italics my own; Stump & Kretzmann, 1981) whilst much the same could be said for the eternalist view of Rogers (2007), where events in time do not really occur all at once, but sequentially, even though they occur all at once for God. Whilst given these differences, the worry raised against Leftow might not be applicable to these positions, we might nonetheless like to know *whether* and *how* a timeless God knows the temporal order of Creation's events even on these views.

One might suppose that this "how" question is misplaced, for they may claim that irrespective as to whether we know "how" a timeless God knows the temporal order of Creation's events, He *must* know the order in virtue of His essential omniscience. Yet this could feel a bit quick. After all, many seek to restrict omniscience in a similar manner to omnipotence, thereby requiring that an omniscient being merely know all that it is possible for a being of that type to know (Wainright, 2010, 49-51; Wierenga, 2004, 95). Perhaps, these truths are just not ones that God could possibly know? Additionally a mere appeal to omniscience to suppose that a timeless God can know truths concerning what is past, present, or future in an absolute sense is standardly deemed insufficient to save timelessness, and so we might not think it should be thought sufficient here either. We need to show that it is possible for a timeless God to know the temporal order of Creation's events.

One way we might think we could do this is through the following thought. Suppose that Lewisian modal realism is true, such that every possible world exists and no world bears any spatio-temporal relations to another. In one of these worlds there happens to be a brilliant logician who writes down a complete and consistent temporal sequence. Given that Lewis's view entails that there is an existing world which contains a sequence of that sort, insofar as the logician knows that modal realism is true, he knows that the temporal sequence of events obtains in some other non-temporally related world. As such, it is possible for someone who has no temporal relations to that world to know the temporal sequence of events within that world and

⁴⁷ Related to the former footnote, some objectors seem to worry that different B-series cannot be represented, for if there is a B-series within eternity then it seems to be a privileged one (De Florio & Frigerio, 2019, p. 239; Craig, 2001a, pp. 103-105). But once again, one should not think there is a B-series in eternity, in terms of events existing with B-relations, but merely that one can represent the events in the order of a B-series within eternity. But as it is only a representation of a B-series, there is no reason, given God's intellectual capabilities, that He cannot represent multiple B-series at once.

therefore a timeless God could possibly know the temporal order of a world He is not temporally related to.

However, we might think this example doesn't give us exactly what we require of God's knowledge. For the logician only knows that the consistent temporal sequence he cooked up represents another world's actual temporal sequence in virtue of modal realism being true. If modal realism wasn't true, which is what most theistic philosophers seem to think, then our logician would have no way of knowing that his temporal sequence corresponded to any existing world. Further, assuming modal realism was true, we might ask our brilliant logician to point out which world happened to exhibit the temporal sequence he devised. Our logician, brilliant as he is, doesn't seem to be able to answer that question, for all he knows is that the sequence is instantiated somewhere in the modal landscape, not where within it it is instantiated. But surely we want God's knowledge to be able to do that, namely not merely rely on the truth of modal realism, and not merely tell us that this temporal sequence is instantiated somewhere, but be able to pick out which world instantiates the temporal sequence and be able to do so even if modal realism was false. The Lewisian possibility above, therefore, doesn't seem to actually give us the possibility we are really after, for it doesn't show whether it's possible for a timeless God to know the temporal order of a specified world, namely Creation.

Therefore, showing how it is possible for a timeless God to have knowledge of Creation's temporal order is important, and one can use what I've said here within this paper and adapt it so that it is applicable to other theories of divine timelessness, rather than just Leftow's. If what I've said is successful, I've therefore shown that it is possible for God to know the end from the beginning, whatever theory of timelessness one adopts.

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