

PHILOSOPHIA CHRISTI
JOURNAL OF THE EVANGELICAL PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Volume 20:1

Spring, 1997

NOT TO BE TAKEN
FROM THE

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THE NATURE OF DIVINE ETERNITY:
A RESPONSE TO WILLIAM CRAIG

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William L. Craig differed with my presentation of God's eternity in his article, "A Critique of Grudem's Formulation & Defense of the Doctrine of Eternity."¹ This essay is written in response to his article.

My definition of God's eternity, as given in my *Systematic Theology*, is as follows:

*God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.*²

1. *Omission of my Scriptural support for atemporal eternity.* Unfortunately, no one reading Dr. Craig's article would have known how I supported this definition of divine eternity, because he only reported one of the several passages I used, and that one only indicated that God had no beginning or end. Regarding my definition, Craig says,

Now it is immediately evident that this affirmation outstrips the biblical passages quoted by Grudem as attestation. From passages like Psalm 90:2, Grudem has no difficulty showing that God has no beginning or end: "Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." But does such a passage support Grudem's affirmation that "God is timeless in his own being" rather than God's beginningless and endless duration? Surely not.

This means that Grudem's affirmation of divine timelessness must be based on extra-biblical arguments..." (33).

He says that I use passages "like Psalm 90:2," but does not tell what they are. He nowhere mentions that I use several passages *that are unlike Ps. 90:2* in support of atemporal divine eternity, including John 8:58; Exod. 3:14; Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; Gen. 1:1; John 1:3; and Job 36:26. By dismissing Psalm 90:2 he gives the impression that all the rest of my support of any significance comes from arguments outside the Bible. But that is not true.

Here are the other verses which I used for support :

(1) John 8:58, where Jesus boldly uses a present tense verb to speak of existence in the past in the phrase, "Before Abraham was, *I am*." This sentence stretches the limits of language in order to express as well as can be expressed the idea that in a time that for us is past (before Abraham existed), Jesus *is*. It is reasonable to think that first century readers would have concluded this very thing from Jesus' bold statement: he has a kind of existence that experiences an eternal "presentness" in all stages of past history.

(2) Exodus 3:14 (the passage which Jesus quotes), in which God says that his name is, "I AM WHO I AM." This passage is probably correctly understood by the Septuagint translation in which the second "I AM" is rendered as *ἄω ὄν*, an articular present participle of *eimi*, indicating "the being-one," or even (if we emphasize the durative force of the present participle) "the one who is characterized by continual present existence."

(3) Genesis 1:1, John 1:3, and other creation passages, which indicate that God created all things "in the beginning." This phrase can appropriately be understood to speak of *the* beginning; that is, in the absolute beginning of every temporal sequence, "in the beginning of all events," or "in the beginning of time." God existed before this event, but at this point, which was *the* beginning, he created the heavens and the earth.

(4) Psalm 90:4, "For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is passed, or as a watch in the night." This passage is especially significant when combined with the following passage:

(5) 2 Peter 3:8, "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In commenting on these passages, I note that these two verses taken together speak of God's relationship to time in a way that we do not and cannot experience: God's experience of time is not just a patient endurance through eons of endless duration, but he has a *qualitatively different* experience of time than we do. This is consistent with the idea that in his own being, God is timeless; he does not experience a succession of moments (170).

Now Craig may or may not agree that these verses prove atemporal eternity for God. And readers of his essay may or may not agree that these verses prove atemporal eternity for God. But Craig did not mention any of these verses. The only one he does mention is Psalm 90:2, which

on page 169 I claim only as support for the idea that God has no beginning or end, not for the idea that God has no succession of moments in his own being. *Therefore Craig has given readers no indication of the Scripture verses that I use in support of the idea that God is timeless in his own being.* Yet the rest of his paper goes on to criticize me for having inadequate Scriptural support.³

This means that Craig incorrectly gives the readers the impression that my affirmation of atemporal eternity for God is "based on extra-biblical arguments" (33). To demonstrate this he quotes my affirmation that there can be no time apart from space and matter, in agreement with current theories in physics. But I use that only as a subsidiary support to the idea that the creation of all things would involve the creation of time when I discuss the creation passages such as Genesis 1:1 and John 1:3.⁴ My support is almost entirely biblical, but Craig claims it is extra-biblical.

2. Is it contradictory to use the expression "before time"?

Craig then differs with my sentence, "God always existed before there was any time." He says,

Unfortunately, Grudem is oblivious to the fact that his claim "God always existed before there was any time" is patently self-contradictory, indeed, doubly so. First, to speak of God's existing "before" time is contradictory because "before" is a temporal relation. So if God existed before time, He existed at some time prior to time, which is obviously a contradiction. Secondly, to say God always existed timelessly is self-contradictory, since "always" is a temporal adverb meaning "at all times." But to say God prior to creation existed both timelessly and at all times is clearly contradictory (34).

This criticism misconstrues my words, and fails to represent fairly the qualifications I have given the words in the very context in which I write this sentence. In fact, the sentence from which Craig takes my statement shows that I do not mean the word "before" to indicate a kind of time before creation, nor do I mean the word "always" to mean a succession of moments. I quote the sentence here in full:

The foregoing Scripture passages and the fact that *God always existed before there was any time* combine to indicate to us that *God's own being does not have a succession of moments or any progress from one state of existence to another* (169).

In the previous paragraph I wrote,

...before God created the universe, there was no "time," at least not in the sense of a succession of moments one after another. Therefore, when God created the universe, he also created time. When God began to create the universe, then time began, and there began to be a succession of moments and events one after another. But before there was a universe, and before there was time, God always existed, without beginning, and without being influenced by time (169).

I am not sure it is possible to express much more explicitly in English the ideas (1) that time began at Genesis 1:1 and (2) that "prior to" Genesis 1:1 time did not exist (and therefore there was no succession of moments or events in this "prior to" or "before"), but (3) that in that timeless reality God still existed, and he existed not just for a brief second or any kind of finite amount of (non!-) time but that he "always" existed timelessly.

What Craig has done in this criticism is to impose inherently contradictory senses on my words, senses that the context shows I did not intend. It is of course possible to do that with anyone's writing -- *criticize by giving the words a sense that the author did not intend, and then say that the words contradict something else the author says*. Such a "non-sympathetic" reading of any author, however, is not proper interpretation.

How would Craig himself express the same ideas which I intended in the paragraph he criticized? We can get a sense of how he would express these ideas in the next paragraph when he says,

Suppose then we reformulate Grudem's expressions so as to say that God *sans* the universe exists timelessly and that time begins at the moment of creation. This is a coherent doctrine (34).

I do not think that his sentence is going to communicate anything very clearly to 95% of the audience for which I wrote this book, namely, students with no previous training in theology or philosophy.⁵ Craig's sentence (translating the French, which I cannot assume for my readers) means

God without the universe exists timelessly.

Does this sentence do any better than mine? To ordinary readers, if not to all readers, this sentence could well be understood to mean that *at the*

present time there is no universe and that God alone exists. God exists "without the universe." How can that be an effective way to communicate what I am trying to say? It would rather communicate something that I do not want to say.

Moreover, just as Craig objects that I bring in a temporal affirmation with the word "always," I could use a similar type of non-sympathetic, non-contextually based interpretation of his words and object that his sentence brings in a temporal affirmation with the present tense verb "exists." "Exists" means, "is now at the present time existing." And doesn't that mean that God exists at the present, which is a temporal location for God? But this contradicts Craig's sentence which says that God exists "timelessly." Therefore on the same kind of quibbling over language I could object that Craig's sentence is not only unclear but also contradictory.

At the bottom of page four he brings in another attempt to state what he thinks to be my view:

God *sans* the universe existed timelessly.

But here I could similarly object that he has brought in a temporal claim with the past tense verb "existed," and once again his sentence contradicts its own affirmation of timeless existence. Therefore it is not clear how Craig could escape a similar kind of accusation of contradiction as well (on a non-sympathetic reading of his words, which I am not endorsing). My point is simply that he has misconstrued my words by failing to understand them in light of the context in which they occurred.

Finally, *if Craig says that my language is self-contradictory, I think he must say that Scripture is self-contradictory as well*. Scripture does not hesitate to speak of God as existing and acting *before* creation: see Psalm 90:2 which speaks of God "*before* the mountains were brought forth" and "[before]...you had formed the earth and the world." Ephesians 1:4 says that God chose us in Christ "*before* the foundation of the world."

I suppose he could argue that thereby these biblical authors imply that God always existed in time, but certainly the vast majority of exegetes through the history of the church have not concluded that from the simple word "before." To them the idea that God existed timelessly before Genesis 1:1 was coherent and non-contradictory, and they used the word "before" in that sense. I think we can use it in that way too.

More significantly, *the Bible itself even speaks about God's existence before there was any time.* Jude 25 says this:

...to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, *before all time* and now and for ever. Amen.

Here Jude ascribes glory, majesty, dominion, and authority to God "before all time (*pro pantos tou aiōnos*) and now and forever." It is significant that Jude's three time descriptors indicate a sequence of past-present-future ("before all time" -- "now" -- "forever"), thereby indicating that *pro pantos tou aiōnos* is correctly translated in a temporal sense, "before all time."⁶ Jude is thinking of glory and majesty that belonged to God in the past. How far in the past? "Before all time," that is, before there was any time! Now if Craig is going to object to my formulation ("God always existed before there was any time") as being "patently self-contradictory," then I don't see how he can avoid objecting to the formulation of Jude as being "patently self-contradictory" as well. Would Craig be willing to affirm that the words of Scripture are self-contradictory? I have known Dr. Craig for many years, and I am confident that he would never want to affirm a contradiction in Scripture. But both Jude and I speak about something that is "before time." Perhaps this passage should be considered in evaluating expressions like "before time."

A good solution at this point is not to quibble over such use of terms but simply to understand that these are perfectly valid ways of expressing a difficult concept in language that is intelligible, and also to understand that such uses of the words "before" and "always" are further qualified by other things that are said in the contexts in which they occur.

3. *Can an atemporal God see events as past, present, and future?*

In analyzing my claim that "God sees all time equally, vividly" Craig's assessment is that

Grudem's exposition of this truth is unfortunately even more incoherent than his treatment of God's timelessness (pages 5-6).

At the outset I want to raise a minor objection against the word "incoherent." I realize that philosophers use this word to mean something like "internally inconsistent," but I wonder if Craig is sufficiently aware of the intensively pejorative overtones that inevitably accompany that word

because of its much more common use in ordinary English to mean "unable to think or express one's thoughts in a clear or orderly manner" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, p. 665)—people who are drunk are commonly said to be *incoherent* in their speech, as are people who are delirious. This more popular sense comes closer to the sense that I hear when this word is applied to my writing, and I think I do so because I am aware that it carries those overtones with most readers. So I am suggesting that Craig (and others!) consider using the phrase "internally inconsistent," which doesn't carry overtones of irrationality and blubbery idiocy! (From the field of theology, a similar example would be the word "heresy," which technically just means a teaching that differs from established doctrine. But I encourage students to use the word very rarely about modern writers, if at all, because overtones of fanaticism and intolerant witch-hunting inevitably accompany the word and it instantly loads debates with emotional baggage which is contrary to "the wisdom from above" which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits" (Jas. 3:17)).

As to the substance of Craig's objection, what he calls "incoherent" is my explanation of God's ability to see all of time equally vividly, which I quote here at length:

We read in Psalm 90:4, "For a *thousand years* in your sight are but as *yesterday* when it is past, or as a *watch* in the night." It is sometimes difficult for us to remember events which occurred several weeks ago, or several months ago, or several years ago. We remember recent events more vividly, and the clarity of our memory fades with the passing of time. Even if it were possible for us to live "a thousand years," we would remember very few events from hundreds of years earlier, and the clarity of that memory would be very low. But here Scripture tells us that God views a thousand years "as yesterday." He can remember all the detailed events of a thousand years at least as clearly as we can remember the events of "yesterday." In fact, to him a thousand years is "as a watch in the night," a three or four hour period during which a guard would stand watch. Such a short period of time would pass quickly and all the events would be easily recalled. Yet this is how a thousand years seems to God.

When we realize that "a thousand years" does not imply that God forgets things after 1,100 or 1,200 years, but rather is here a figurative expression for an extremely long period of time — for as long a time as one might imagine — it becomes evident that *all of past history*

is viewed by God with great clarity and vividness: all of time since the creation is to God as if it just happened. And it will always remain just that clear in his consciousness, throughout millions of years of eternity future.

In the New Testament, Peter tells us, "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). The second half of this statement had already been made in Psalm 90, but the first half introduces an additional consideration, "One day is as a thousand years"; that is, any one day from God's perspective seems to last for "a thousand years": it is as if that day never ends, but is always being experienced. Again, since "a thousand years" is a figurative expression for "as long a time as we can imagine," or "all history," we can say from this verse that any one day seems to God to be present to his consciousness forever.

Taking these two considerations together, we can say the following: in God's perspective, any extremely long period of time is as if it just happened. And any very short period of time (such as one day) seems to God to last forever: it never ceases to be "present" in his consciousness. Thus, God sees and knows all events — past, present, and future — with equal vividness (170).⁷

Craig gives an abbreviated quotation of this passage, then objects by making the only exegetical statement in his essay:

Let me say that this seems to me a wholly fanciful exegesis of Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8, which are probably just making the point that to an everlasting being, finite intervals of times are a matter of indifference (36).

Here Craig's interpretation imports into the text something that it does not mention, namely, whether God attaches any importance to finite intervals of time. But the text says nothing about whether they are important to God or "a matter of indifference." Nor does this explanation fit the text's comparison to the way humans recall "yesterday" or "a watch in the night," because some "yesterdays" and night watches would not be viewed by an ancient Israelite with "indifference" but as times of much significance. The point is not whether people think times just past are important or not; the comparison that forms a more natural analogy to the human experiences of thinking about "yesterday when it is past, or...a watch in the night" is to compare how vividly they are recalled. Craig

offers us no basis on which he concluded that my explanation -- which compares our recall of the recent past with God's recall of a thousand years -- is "fanciful." This is simply stated as his evaluation. It is hard to understand how my interpretation, which talks about the way a thousand years or a day are experienced by God, is fanciful, but Craig's interpretation, which talks about the importance that God places on these days (an idea foreign to the comparison), is not fanciful. Simply to say that my view is "wholly fanciful" is to argue by means of unsupported assertion.

Then he says,

Grudem does not seem to notice that his account is actually incompatible with divine timelessness. Perfect recall of the past and retention of the present describe the experience of an everlasting deity, not a timeless one. A timeless God does not literally, retain, or anticipate, but has all his knowledge timelessly (36).

Once again, Craig's interpretation without attention to context has become misinterpretation. We need *some* words to speak of God's knowledge of our past, our present, and our future, even if we simultaneously hold that God has all his knowledge timelessly, which I do. In fact, Craig fails to note that I say that "God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible *in one simple and eternal act*" (190). I agree that all of God's knowledge is simultaneously present in his consciousness. But the Bible frequently speaks of God "remembering" something and therefore I do not think it is inappropriate or inconsistent for us to speak this way when we want to refer to God's awareness of events that have happened in our past, events which he recognizes as already having occurred and therefore being "past." This should not be interpreted as a denial of divine timelessness, but a way of understanding God's knowledge of our existence in time.

Craig says that,

Grudem's claim that for God a day lasts forever or is always present is problematic. If this were literally true, then God would not only be grossly mistaken, since today only lasts 24 hours, but worse he would not even know what day in the history of the world really is present, since they all run together in his experience (36).

Once again, Craig has given readers an inaccurate representation of what I actually wrote. I did not say that for God a day "is always present," as

he claims, but that a day "seems to God to be *present to his consciousness forever*" (170). This is just another way of saying that all of God's knowledge of past history is vivid in his consciousness; it does not say that history seems to him to stand still or that days that are past do not seem to be past.

Nor is it accurate to say that on my view all days "run together" in God's experience. I deny this explicitly, something Craig fails to tell his readers in this section (he does mention it later; see section 6 below). The very next sentence after the quotation which Craig criticizes is this:

This should never cause us to think that God does not see events *in time* and act *in time* ..., but just the opposite: God is the eternal Lord and Sovereign over history, and he sees it more clearly and acts in it more decisively than any other (170).

On the immediately preceding page I said, ...this does not mean that all events of history look to God as if they were present, for God sees events *in time* and acts *in time* (169, n. 15).

Of course God knows that today lasts twenty-four hours and of course he knows what day in the history of the world is present today. He knows that the events of the last 1000 years of history are already *past* (in time), those 1000 years do not appear to him "as today" but "as yesterday when it is past" or "as a watch in the night." I did not say anything different from that in my text but rather affirmed it.

4. Do I hold a B-Theory of Time?

On pages 36-37 Craig enters an extended discussion of the A-theory and B-theory of time. He says, "Grudem evinces no knowledge of this debate" (37). In this he is correct, in that before reading Craig's paper I had no knowledge of that debate.

But what I object to here is that he imposes on my writing the advocacy of a theory that I do not advocate (namely, the B-theory of time), and which I was not even aware of before reading his paper! He says this is evident in my diagram (which schematically shows God overseeing all of time).

But as I read Craig's explanation of the B-theory of time, where past, present, and future events are equally real and equally existent, I certainly do not agree with it. In order to be faithful to hundreds of narratives of Scripture, I think we must affirm that *some events are past* (they are not any longer happening, but they have already happened in the past) and *some events are future* (they have not yet happened).

What I object to here is that Craig then goes on to criticize me (37) as if I held this B-theory of time, which I do not hold. As with earlier matters where Craig imposed on my words a sense foreign to my context and which I did not intend, so here he has imposed on my diagram a theory which I did not advocate and which I do not hold, and then criticized me as if I held that theory.

5. Can a timeless God act in time?

In the next section Craig objects that my claim "God sees events in time and acts in time" is logically incompatible with timelessness, and that I ought rather to claim that "While God's acts are timeless, his effects are in time" (37).

At this point I differ with Craig's claim that the idea that God acts in time is incompatible with timelessness. Craig says, "If God has different acts at different times, then he is changing" (38). I would say he is acting, but he is not changing in his being. His "being, perfections, purposes, and promises" (*Systematic Theology*, 163) remain the same. But I must insist that God actually acts in time.

Once again it is the language of Scripture that constrains me: God "sees," he "speaks" to his people, he hears and answers prayers, he delivers his people from distress, he sends his Son; he judges the ungodly and blesses the righteous. Nowhere does Scripture give us precedent to say that "God's acts are timeless but his effects are in time." Rather, God *acts in time* from Genesis to Revelation. I cannot stop affirming that, because the Bible never stops affirming it.

Perhaps Craig and I mean different things by saying "God acts in time." When I say this, I mean that although God in his own being is outside of time, his actions are actions that occur within the creation and within time which is part of creation. I do not mean, when I say that "God acts in time," that "God's being becomes temporal and then he acts."

Craig says that "changes in a thing's relational properties are just as temporalizing as changes in a thing's intrinsic properties" (38). I don't agree with him here. There certainly is a difference between (a) God's own being and (b) how he relates to creatures outside of himself. Craig affirms without proof that changes in his relationship are "just as temporalizing" as changes in his being, but I do not see how he can affirm that with any confidence. Why can it not be that (a) God is timeless in his own being, and does not ever become temporal in his own being, but (b) creates time and, as Lord of what he has created, he can cause events to happen in that time?

A good dose of creaturely humility is appropriate here. If God's being is in fact not subject to time, and he existed eternally "before" there was any time, then eternity is another of God's attributes in which *he is fundamentally different from everything else that exists*. (This fundamental difference is seen also in many other attributes, such as his omnipresence, omniscience, independence, and Trinitarian nature -- none of which have any fully adequate analogy in the creation). But if in God's atemporal eternity he is fundamentally different from everything else that exists, then on what basis can we know anything about God's relationship to time? Certainly not on the basis of analogies to anything in the universe, because God is different from it all in his relationship to time. The only way we can know anything about an atemporally eternal God's relationship to time is by revelation from God himself -- that is, from the Bible.

This is why, when Craig says things like, "changes in a thing's relational properties are just as temporalizing as changes in a thing's intrinsic properties" (38), or, "changes in God's acts would involve intrinsic changes in God" (38), he is far too confident of things that cannot be known from observation of the universe or reflection on its properties. When he says my statement about God's seeing events in time and acting in time is "logically incompatible with timelessness," he should make it clear that it is "logically incompatible" only based on a prior assumption that he (somehow) knows what divine timelessness allows and doesn't allow, and that I, together with the vast majority of theologians in the history of the church, who hold to both divine timelessness and God's real acts in time, do not know what divine timelessness allows. It is not "logic" which leads to his criticism here, but this major unsupported assumption about the nature of reality.

Once again, the Bible does not speak in the way Dr. Craig speaks, but instead affirms that God is atemporally eternal (see verses above) and unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises (Ps. 102:25-

27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:10-12; Jas. 1:17; Num. 23:19; Ps. 33:11; Isa. 46:9-11), and also affirms thousands of times that he really does act in time. Craig has misunderstood something in the nature of divine eternity and its relationship to time, even though the vast gulf that separates the Creator from the creature may not allow us to know exactly what has been misunderstood, at least not in this age.

6. *Is there time other than physical time?*

Craig asserts that there is a difference between physical time or measured time, and time itself which is "a much richer metaphysical reality" (34). I agree of course that there can be time apart from our measurement of time (there was time before any human being was created). But in this section Craig affirms more than that; he simply assumes without proving the idea that there can be time apart from the material universe. He seems here to equate time as it exists in the material universe with "physical time" and "measured time" -- if he meant to distinguish among these, it was not clear to me as I read his article.

Craig's purpose here is to support his claim that my view of time, "which equates time with physical time," is "reductionistic" (34). But my view is reductionistic only if there is some other kind of time than that which is known to us in the universe as it exists. (If not, then my view is not "reductionistic," but rather his is "speculative," if we must attach labels.) I agree that there is a hypothetical possibility that there *could* be time apart from matter and space, some kind of non-physical time. But I don't know how much good that hypothetical possibility does for us, because we have no way of knowing, in our present state of existence, whether any other kind of "time" is even possible or not. Once again, his criticism is based on an assumption which he has not proven, and which, in the nature of the subject matter, may not even be capable of proof in our present state of existence, if at all.

7. *Is there a possibility of time in the angelic realm?*

Craig mentions the idea that there might be spiritual beings such as angels who would exist despite the absence of matter or space and who would still exist in time (34). In this point I partially agree with him. I suppose God could have created the angels and other spiritual beings before he created any "matter," at least in the sense that we understand matter. (I do not think he did, since Exod. 20:11 says, "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and *all that is in them*, and rested

the seventh day" and thereby places the creation of all things in heaven and earth within the time span reported in Genesis 1.) But if God had created angels before the material universe, then in that case I agree there would be time without the kind of "matter" that we now know.

However, I still think there would be space in that case, because I think that angels are finite spiritual beings who exist at only one place at one time (the Bible often talks about them going from one place to another, and never portrays them as omnipresent). In fact, I think that in the intermediate state we ourselves will exist as disembodied spirits, but we will still be in only one place at one time. Therefore, I think the existence of finite spiritual beings implies the existence of space, but not necessarily the existence of "matter" at least in the way that we understand matter. I appreciate that Craig has raised this qualification. But I would also say that "angelic time" doesn't prove that there can be time without space. And perhaps we should think of angelic spirits as made of some different kind of "matter" that we are unfamiliar with in our current state.

8. *Final Comments*

So where does all this leave us? In looking back over Craig's article, I would say the following: The article chose to analyze my treatment of perhaps the most difficult of all topics to discuss in English (or maybe in any language). The article criticized me on the basis of meanings for my words which I did not intend but which the article imposed on my writings, and which were contrary to explanations that I gave in the very contexts in which those words appeared. The article also criticized me on the basis of a theory that it attributed to me but I did not hold. In other places it criticized me on the basis of unsupported assertions that assumed things about the nature of an atemporally eternal God which it is impossible for us to know apart from revelation, and which Scriptural revelation does not affirm. It failed to mention the most significant Scripture passages which I used to support my claims, and then criticized me for having inadequate Scripture support. It provided no constructive alternative to my formulations, at least none that were consistent with what I actually believe. But the suggestion that angels could have existed as temporal but non-material beings I find to be an interesting one, which may helpfully be explored in future discussions of atemporal divine eternity.

Perhaps some of the fault for the misunderstandings is mine. Perhaps I did not write clearly enough to make my intended meaning clear. If this

was the case, I would like to correct what I wrote for future printings of the book. Moreover, both Dr. Craig and I would like to make clear that some mixups in communication, and some delays on my part, meant that his article was published before he had a chance to take account of comments that I had sent to him attempting to clarify some of what I have now written in this article. But because the article was already published, it seemed appropriate to respond in this way to what had appeared in print, in the hope of correcting some possible misunderstandings of my position. Dr. Craig is a former colleague and I count him as a friend, and I highly respect his many writings. I regret that I have to disagree so directly with him in print in this way. Yet I think both he and I hope that through this dialogue there may be some increase in our understanding of the relationship between God and time.

Having said those things, however, I think I am still justified in holding the same definition of God's eternity with which I began:

God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.

ENDNOTES

¹William L. Craig, "A Critique of Grudem's Formulation & Defense of the Doctrine of Eternity," *Philosophia Christi* 19:1 (Spring, 1996), 33-38.

²Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: IVP, and Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 168.

³He does mention Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 later, in the consideration of whether God sees all time equally vividly, but he fails to note that I also use these verses in support of the idea that God is timeless in his own being.

⁴At any rate, the study of modern physics is surely not necessary for the conclusion that Genesis 1:1 involves the beginning of time, for that idea can be found in the 19th century in Herman Bavinck, and in the commentary of Keil and Delitzsch, both written several decades before Einstein.

⁵See the first two sentences of *Systematic Theology* (page 15): I am writing for students with no prior training in theology.

⁶This is the translation of the NASB, ASB, RSV, and NRSV; the NIV reads, "before all ages," which has a similar sense. The phrase *pro pantos tou aiōnos* is missing from the Textus Receptus and therefore "before all time" does not occur in the KJV, and is put as a marginal reading in the NKJV. The phrase is so well attested in other manuscripts, however, that its omission is not even listed as a variant in the UBS³ Greek text.

⁷I support the idea of God's knowledge of the future from Isa. 45:21, 46:9-10, and "the repeated emphasis on God's ability to predict the future in the Old Testament prophets" (171-172).

REFLECTIONS FROM PLATO'S CAVE Musings on the History of Philosophy

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"There's something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out."
--Shakespeare

Homo Sapiens, they call us, the thinking people; if it is so, it is because first we are *homo quaerens*, the ones who must question everything. We started early, noticing and wondering about the apparent discrepancy between the earth, where everything seemed subject to the ravages of time, and the heavens, which seemed perfect and unchanging except in predictable cycles.¹ We have been unable for long to resist the impulse to find a unity behind the diverse appearances that surround us. Accepting such surface polarities as Time vs. Eternity, Change vs. Permanence, as ultimate, has until the advent of Post-Modernity seemed like a defeat that made us less than human. But the search for a unity based on human experience alone has often led to various dead ends.

One of the first was reached by the Pre-Socratics, who, in a day before the building of many bridges, apparently had to ford a lot of streams.

Men once thought that it would be nice
To step in the same river twice.
But then Heraclitus,
As if just to spite us,
Said, "No! Once will have to suffice."

"The water is flowing away;
The new that arrives does not stay.
Therefore, my conclusion:
All else is illusion.
There is Change; that is all we can say."

Parmenides answered, "Not so!
The stream doth eternally flow.
What is *permanent's* real;
So, whatever you feel,
There's no motion and no place to go."