

# Timelessness *à la* Leftow<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Brian Leftow has argued in significant detail for a timeless conception of God. However, his work has been interacted with less than one might expect, especially given that some have contended that divine timelessness should be put to death and buried. Further, the work that has critically interacted with Leftow does a very poor job at discrediting it, or so I will contend. As we shall see, the main reason for this is either because what is central to Leftow's view is not affected by the objection, or because Leftow provides another way of getting his theory off the ground. Why, then, do so many objections miss the mark? I suspect it's because many struggle to understand Leftow's view and what is central to it. As such, one of the main goals of this paper will be to make Leftow's account more accessible and to elucidate the main elements of the theory, whilst also providing responses to the main objections raised against his view. The overall result of this, I hope, will be a more fruitful examination of Leftow's view in the future.

**Keywords:** Eternity, Brian Leftow, Timelessness, Anselm, Atemporal

Brian Leftow has argued in significant detail for a timeless conception of God. In 1991, when his book *Time and Eternity* was released, it was called a "tour de force" (Felt, 1994, 525), a book "no one . . . can afford to ignore" (Quinn, 1996, 133;

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<sup>1</sup> This paper came about largely due to the UK lockdown, during which I decided that my 'lockdown project' would be to get to grips with Leftow's view of God's relationship to time. This has been far more stimulating than I had imagined and I want to thank Brian for numerous email discussions about this topic and his help in making sure that I got his view right (I hope that I have done it justice). I suspect that Brian never quite imagined, when he first taught and supervised me, that I would pester him quite as much as I have about numerous things post my official studies. I thank him for both his patience and guidance. I also want to thank the participants of the 2021 Sharif Summer School on Theism where I presented an earlier version of this paper.

Padgett, 1992, 431), one that “no subsequent discussions of the topic will be able to neglect” (Stump, cited in Felt, 1994, 525), and “the contemporary classic on eternity and will remain central to future discussions of eternity” (Smith, 1995, 54). As such, it seems odd that Leftow’s work hasn’t been interacted with more thoroughly and extensively, especially when some have recently claimed that divine timelessness should be put to death and buried (Mullins, 2016, 1).<sup>2</sup> Further, the work that has critically interacted with Leftow does a very poor job of discrediting it, or so I will contend. As we shall see, the main reason for this is either because what is central to Leftow’s view is not affected by the objections, or because Leftow provides another way of getting his theory off the ground.

Why, then, do so many objections miss the mark? I suspect it’s because many struggle to understand Leftow’s view and what’s central to it.<sup>3</sup> Rogers is quite explicit in admitting this, writing of Leftow’s theory, “that ‘I am not sure’ and ‘I fear I do not understand’ are phrases that will crop up repeatedly in the following discussion” (2009, 321).<sup>4</sup> As such the goal of this paper is to make Leftow’s account more accessible and to elucidate the main elements of his theory, whilst in the process, answering the major objections found in print to his view.

Before proceeding let me note a few things. First, I only concentrate on what is central to Leftow’s view, and so won’t discuss the plausibility of what I call his optional extras or bells and whistles. I also won’t address general arguments against timelessness, since one needs to be orientated with Leftow’s view before seeing how some of his responses work against these.<sup>5</sup> Likewise I’ll ignore objections (e.g. Craig, 2001, 8–42) against Leftow’s multiple arguments for

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<sup>2</sup> Mullins’s (2016) book provides an example of this oddity, for although his book is against divine timelessness it interacts very little with Leftow’s work, even though Leftow has probably written the most in defence of divine timelessness in recent years.

<sup>3</sup> Lack of accessibility and unclarity over the main points of the theory was also a concern of Felt (1994, 527).

<sup>4</sup> Anecdotally, I’ve heard similar comments from several other philosophers, whilst also Mullins explicitly says he cannot make sense of some of Leftow’s view (2016, 153, n.93).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Leftow argues against claims that timelessness cannot solve the freedom foreknowledge problem (1991a, 246–265; 1991b), that a timeless God cannot be omniscient due to temporal propositions and/or temporal facts (1990a; 1991a, 313–348; 2018), that a timeless God cannot be a person (1991a, 283–312; 1991c; 2014), and that Cambridge changes imply a change in God (2018). There have also been objections to timelessness based on its alleged inconsistency with other Christian doctrines, such as the Incarnation, which Leftow has also responded to (2002b).

timelessness (1991a, 267–282), and won't enter into any debates of historical exegesis, leaving these concerns to the historians of philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

It's also helpful to make a general methodological remark that I take it Leftow would agree with. Aristotle once said, "it is the mark of an educated person to look in each area for only that degree of accuracy that the nature of the subject permits" (1094b 24–26, translated by Crisp, 2014, 4–5). I take this to be a wise saying,<sup>7</sup> and one philosophers of religion ought to heed. After all, given that God is both transcendent and perfect, and we are finite and imperfect reasoners, it seems unlikely that our philosophising about God will be as precise and accurate as some of our other philosophical endeavours.<sup>8</sup> All we are likely to achieve, I suggest, is something of a glimmer of God's nature. Leftow, I think, would agree, for he writes,

As a Christian, I am told that where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ... [1 Corinthians 13: 9–10, 12] So I work with a guarantee that the best I can do is not good enough and will be obsolete. Why then try to describe God? Some of us just can't wait to open our Christmas present. If my beliefs are true and I explain them well, we may all get a glimpse of it. If my beliefs are false and I explain them well, I still help make the truth better known, as I push others to show where I err. ... Gregory the Great spent long years writing a tome on angels. There is a story that when he got to heaven, he found that he was dead wrong. His reaction? He laughed. I hope someday to react that well. (2000, 145)

Nevertheless, this admission does not licence an appeal to ignorance or mystery whenever one wishes (Pawl, 2016, 88–91), but it should give us reason to be content with appeals to pictures (e.g., Leftow, 2014, 248), analogues (e.g., Leftow, 2001a, 191; 2002a, 42),<sup>9</sup> and remote possibilities when providing a positive

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, Rogers claims the view Leftow attributes to Anselm isn't Anselm's (2009) and Felt makes the same point regarding Aquinas (1994, 526).

<sup>7</sup> With another fount of wisdom, Plato, making a similar point in the *Timaeus* (29b-d, translated by Cooper, 1997, 135–136).

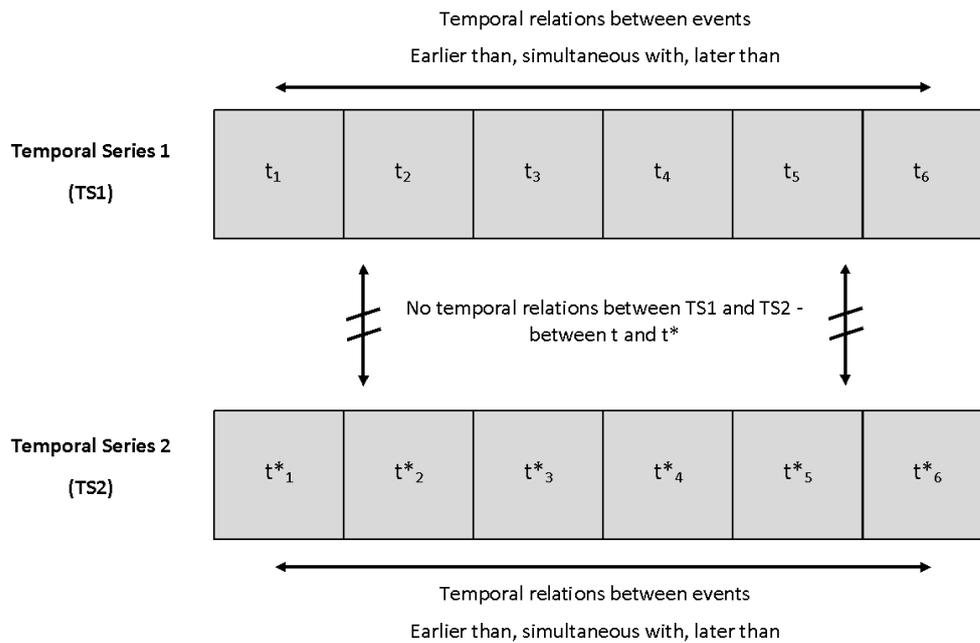
<sup>8</sup> Leftow appears to concur, writing in the context of perfect being reasoning, 'I give many perfect-being arguments in what follows. As I give them, I have a nagging fear that I am just making stuff up. This is not due to uncertainty about God's being perfect. Rather, our ideas of what it is to be perfect are inconsistent and flawed, and there is no guarantee that they match up with what God's perfection really is.' (2012a, 11–12)

<sup>9</sup> Talk of analogues doesn't commit me to the "doctrine of analogy," with this doctrine being something Leftow rejects (1991a, 239, n.20).

account of God’s nature, since this is likely the best we can do, and is what Leftow intends to give us concerning divine timelessness.

### Discrete Timelines

Discrete timelines are key for understanding Leftow’s view (1991a; 1991b; 1991d; 2001a; 2002a; 2005; 2014; 2018), since he thinks God’s relationship to time is analogous to or like these (1991d, 174; 1991a, 51, 57; 2001a, 191, 2002a, 42). The thought, put simply, is that it is possible that there be multiple temporally unconnected timelines, such that although there may be temporal relations internal to each timeline, there are no temporal relations between the timelines. This can be visualised as follows, where Temporal Series 1 (TS1) has events that are temporally related to each other, but not temporally related to Temporal Series 2 (TS2):



Leftow provides two reasons for thinking such timelines are possible.<sup>10</sup> The first is that we can provide a consistent abstract diagram of them, which provokes an intuition of possibility, whilst the second suggests that inflationary cosmologies appear to allow for their possibility (2018, 184; 1991a, 22).<sup>11</sup> Another reason for

<sup>10</sup> Leftow’s (forthcoming) book on God and time provides further worked out reasons.

<sup>11</sup> For additional defenders of discrete timelines see references in (Leftow, 1991a, 21, n. 4). Leftow also discusses how we could know there was a second timeline, and argues that non-

thinking discrete timelines are possible comes from arguments in favour of island universes (e.g. Bricker, 2020, ch.4; Baron & Tallant, 2016, 588–593). Although more could be said in their defence, I take it that in light of these considerations we have *prima facie* grounds for thinking discrete timelines are possible.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, as Leftow is primarily interested in whether divine timelessness and presentism are compatible, given that he is attracted to presentism (2002a, 43, n.6) and so to show that people are wrong to think that only eternalism is compatible with timelessness (2018, 175–176, n. 8; 1991a, 18), it needs to be the case that discrete timelines are compatible with presentism.<sup>13</sup> Leftow (2018) argues that this is the case, and elsewhere I have shown how three popular forms of presentism can allow for multiple discrete timelines (Page, manuscript a).<sup>14</sup>

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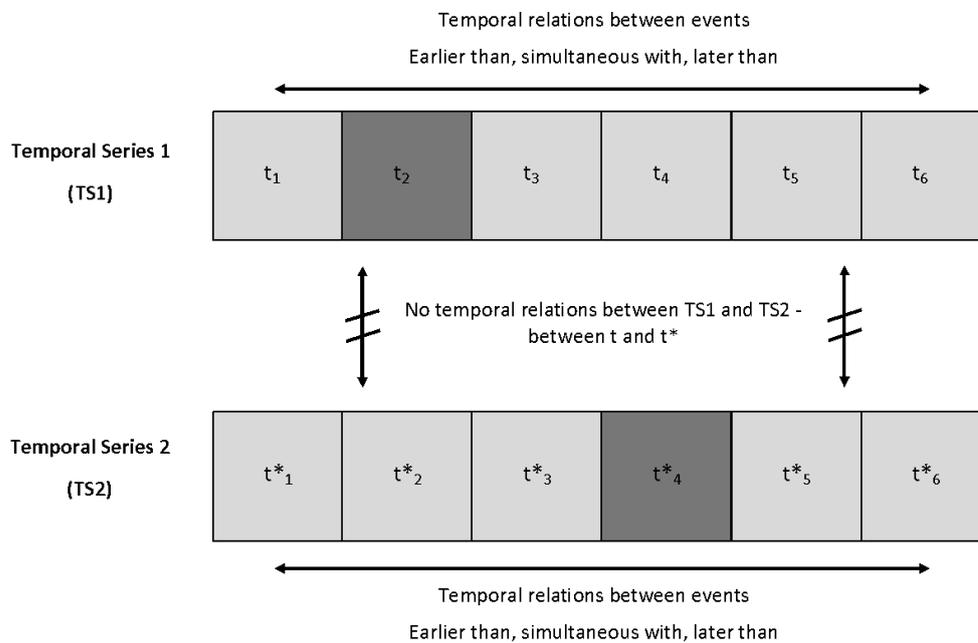
theistic answers provide no sure way to know this (1991a, 22–31). Oppy demurs, suggesting that our best naturalistic theories of the early universe could entail that there are disconnected regions of space-time (2014, 112) and that through this we could come to know there was a second discrete timeline. Given what Leftow says elsewhere, he *may* now agree with this (2018, 184, n. 37).

<sup>12</sup> Sider and Bennett, however, give us a reason to think they are not. Sider, for instance, suggests that within possible-worlds semantics for tense logic we *might* wish to embrace some type of connectivity (2010, 190–191). His strong formulation of connectivity rules out discrete timelines, whilst his weak formulation allows for them, but rules out branching times, something inflationary cosmologies seem to imply is possible. Yet Sider doesn't claim that one *must* embrace connectivity, and given that he appears to want to allow for the possibility of island universes elsewhere (2003, 195–196), it isn't clear to me that he thinks possible-world semantics requires connectivity, but only that it causes additional logical headaches if it isn't accepted. Bennett (2016, 64–71), however, claims that the singularity of time is analytic. This, however, is something that many will and do deny (Miller, 1990, 455). Bennett claims further, that 'any attempt to describe experience which would lead us to say that there were two complete times would fail as completely as the attempt to describe atemporal experience: for deep logical reasons, we are as unavoidably committed to a one-dimensional, all-inclusive time series as we are to temporality as such . . . . [W]e cannot strip our temporal concepts of those features which make it necessary that there is only one complete time.' (2016, 70) Obviously defenders of timelessness will deny that we will completely fail when describing atemporal experience, but they can also say that all Bennett does here is state that we lack the imaginative powers to think about multiple timelines, rather than proving an argument that they aren't possible. Leftow gives arguments to suggest they are possible, and that we can imagine such scenarios.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Young III, following Mullins (2016, 99), writes that, "divine timelessness cannot be reconciled with a presentist conception of time." (2021, 171) Note, also that Leftow thinks his theory will be compatible with a tenseless theory of time too (1991a, 18).

<sup>14</sup> A reviewer worries that Leftow's account ends up not being presentist, but if one embraces Leftow's definition of temporal presentism, "TP1. Something is temporal, and for temporal things, existence only plays the role of absolute temporal presentness, or TP2. Something is temporal, each time has its own sole class of all temporal things, and no such class contains anything wholly past or wholly future" (2018, 175), then it seems what he gives us is presentist. Exactly how presentism should be defined is a hotly debated business, with some even

Given this, I'll assume discrete presentist timelines are possible and will proceed in explicating discrete timelines in presentist terms, with the dark time-slice signalling the existing present moment in each timeline.



Here we can say that within TS1,  $t_2$  is present,  $t_1$  is past and  $t_3$  is future, and in TS2,  $t^*_4$  is present,  $t^*_3$  is past and  $t^*_5$  is future. But we can't say, for instance, that  $t^*_4$  is in  $t_2$ 's present, since it isn't. This is because no temporal relations hold between the two timelines, as per their stipulation of their being discrete, and if  $t^*_4$  was in  $t_2$ 's present then there would be temporal relations between the two events. Therefore, and importantly, discrete presentist timelines have multiple presents, one present within each timeline, with this being something that Rogers (2009, 326) misses when trying to understand Leftow's view.<sup>15</sup> The picture we end up with is one in which no event in TS1 is in TS2's present, past, or future and no event in TS2 is in TS1's present, past, or future either.

An additional consequence that arises from this is that contrary to what we might think is natural to say on presentism, namely that if something has

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suggesting that it cannot be done given that there is no unifying feature that determines what presentism is (Tallant & Ingram, 2021). This, however, is something I cannot delve into here.

<sup>15</sup> This observation also goes some way to answering Rogers' concern that presentism cannot be compatible with divine timelessness, since "all that exists is the present moment. That means that God exists only in the present moment, since that is all there is" (2011, 11). For if presentism is compatible with discrete timelines, then there can be more than one present within reality, with one perhaps being a temporal present whilst the other is an eternal present.

presentness then it must “now” exist, turns out to be false. In TS1  $t_2$  is present and so “now” exists in TS1, but  $t^*_4$  does not “now” exist in TS1, even though it does “now” exist in TS2 (Leftow, 2001a, 188; 2002a, 35). As such, those in TS1 can say of  $t^*_4$  that it occurs, so long as “occurs” is used without any tense (Leftow, 2005, 69). They can also say that  $t^*_4$  exists, so long as “exists” is tenseless, since if they said that  $t^*_4$  exists at  $t_2$ , or now, or then, or presently, or at any other point within TS1, this would be false in virtue of the timelines being discrete (Leftow, 1991a, 50, 46, 56; 2018, 184–189).<sup>16</sup>  $t^*_4$  therefore exists, but it does not exist at any time within TS1.

With this in hand, we can see that discrete timelines can be said to be “extrinsically timeless” (Leftow, 1991a, 22) in that they have no temporal relations to anything outside themselves, even though they can be internally temporal in virtue of having temporal relations within their own timelines. A timeless God is therefore related to time as discrete timelines are related to each other. However, a timeless God is also said to be intrinsically timeless, and in a moment I will address how Leftow understands this. However, before doing so, let me respond to a couple of objections that might already be raised against Leftow’s view.

One concern is ontological pluralism, since Oppy (2014, 121) contends that Leftow’s view requires endorsing this thesis, and the necessity of this controversial thesis might give us reason to reject Leftow’s view. Whilst one might not be all that concerned about embracing ontological pluralism, especially given its recent defences (e.g. McDaniel, 2017), it is a mistake to think that Leftow’s view requires its adoption in virtue of its use of discrete timelines. To see this, suppose that we adopt Leftow’s existence presentism, where presentism concerns *what it is* to exist (2018, 173–175). On this view, what it is to exist is tied to being present and so given that there are different distinct presents, with what is present being subscripted to a timeline, so too will what exists be subscripted to timelines. For just as there is no present simpliciter that ranges across all timelines on this account, so too, in virtue of how presentism is understood, will there be no existence simpliciter, even though it is still the case that *for something to exist is for it to be present* and as such no ontological pluralism is required. One might have other reasons for disliking such a view, perhaps in virtue of thinking

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<sup>16</sup> This point is developed in Leftow (2018) where he distinguishes between “exists” and “EXISTS.” I provide an explication of this account elsewhere (Page, 2023).

that there must be a single all-encompassing present-tensed quantifier, but, as Leftow says, “it is not part of presentism as defined above that there be one,” and it is not “slam-dunk obvious” that there should be one (2018, 185).

Alternatively, one might take presentism to be about *what* exists (e.g. Markosian, 2004, 47; Crisp, 2004; 2007), but those who take presentism to be of this sort often restrict their claims about what exists to what exists within time. Thus, Bourne writes, “presentism is a theory about what actually exists in time; it says nothing about the existence of anything else. Presentism, like any other theory of time, can have more in its ontology than just objects located in the present” (2006, 79–80). As such, given how many presentists restrict their quantifiers, it seems they will be open to a wider, non-present tensed quantifier that will range over the existence of multiple discrete presents and timeless entities.<sup>17</sup> But a presentist of this type might not even need to go that far, as their claim that “for every  $x$ , if  $x$  existed, exists, or will exist, then  $x$  is a present thing” (Crisp, 2004, 18), can allow for the existence of multiple discrete timelines given a particular understanding of “present.” For if one follows Crisp’s contention that we should understand “present” here to be that “ $\forall y(x$  has no temporal distance from  $y$ )” (2007, 102–103), then discrete timelines will be subsumed under the notion of present here, since they have no temporal distance from each other. This won’t be in virtue of the temporal distance between the two timelines being zero, but in virtue of the distance relation between the two being empty and valueless, and as such these discrete timelines will be included within the presentists domain of quantification.<sup>18</sup>

However, Oppy might justifiably pushback and claim that the reason he speaks of ontological pluralism is because Leftow himself does, since Leftow

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<sup>17</sup> Craig (2000, 227) is another example of one who wants to allow that presentism doesn’t in principle rule out timeless entities. Leftow (2018, 173–175) also contends that this more restricted version of presentism is what historically has gone by the name of presentism. Additionally, we can suggest, along with Crisp (2004, 18), that a presentist who invokes a universal quantifier can state the same thing differently by shifting to a restricted quantifier, one whose domain is restricted to the class of all things in time, the class of all things that existed, exist now, or will exist. If they do this, then once again it will be open to them that there is a more universal quantifier which can include the discrete timelines.

<sup>18</sup> There is obviously a question as to how we make sense of their being discrete presents on this view, since as I’ve noted, discrete timelines are said not to have the same present. Here one can make use of another feature of Crisp’s ersatz presentism, namely that there is another notion of present,  $present_2$  (2007, 103), and that from within one timeline whilst it will have a moment that is  $present_2$ , no moment within the other timeline will be  $present_2$ . It is beyond this paper to spell this out more fully, but I do so elsewhere (Page, manuscript a).

follows Augustine in arguing that existence can come in degrees, with a timeless being having the highest degree of existence (1991a, ch. 5). Yet despite this, Oppy is wrong to think that Leftow's account *requires* that one adopts degrees of existence, for ultimately the role it ends up playing for Leftow is in providing him with another argument for thinking that God is timeless (1991a, 278), and given that Leftow provides many such arguments (1991a, ch.12), this could be dropped. As such, refusing to embrace ontological pluralism does no damage to Leftow's fundamental theory and so it is not scathed by Oppy's concern.

### Types of Timelessness

Many discussions of God's relationship to time suggest that there are merely two options before us; either God is purely temporal, or He is purely timeless. However, as Leftow notes, these aren't the only possibilities, as there are intermediate positions both regarding God being temporal or timeless (2005, 51–58; 2002a, 23), and Leftow's view is one that takes an intermediate timeless position.

This is most evident from Leftow's discussion of what he calls "typically temporal properties" (2002a, 22–23), and his insistence that some of these apply to God, specifically, that God has a present or now.<sup>19</sup> Leftow is not alone in thinking this, with his account being partly inspired by Boethius's famous definition of eternity:

Eternity is the whole, simultaneous, perfect possession of limitless life, which we can better understand perhaps by comparing it to temporal things. One who lives in time progresses in the present from the past and into the future. There is nothing in time that can embrace the entirety of his existence . . . . What may properly be called eternal is quite different, in that it has knowledge of the whole of life, can see the future, and has lost nothing of the past. It is in an eternal present and has an understanding of the entire flow of time. (Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* V.6, 2008, 168–169; *De Trinitate* IV, 1973, 20–23)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This *may* be in contrast with what Leftow said in an earlier work, namely, "I have called eternity logically a 'time' even though it has no temporal properties" (1991a, 72), although even in this work he does allow that eternity is a present (1991a, 52). It may therefore be that there is just merely a difference in presentation.

<sup>20</sup> Anselm thinks this too (*De Concordia* 1.5, 2016, 539; *Proslogion* 22, 2016, 107), and so does Aquinas (*De Potentia Dei*, q.1, a.5, ad.2.)

God, therefore, is said to live in a present, an eternal present, and unlike the present of creatures, God's present does not move/change. Whilst those in time live their lives part by part, with their lives being characterised by temporal succession, God, having no parts in His life, undergoes no succession either. God's life is, therefore, very much like what Latham and Miller, in a non-theological context, call a one-instant or stopped presentist world, a world that contains a single present instant (2020, 145). As Leftow says,

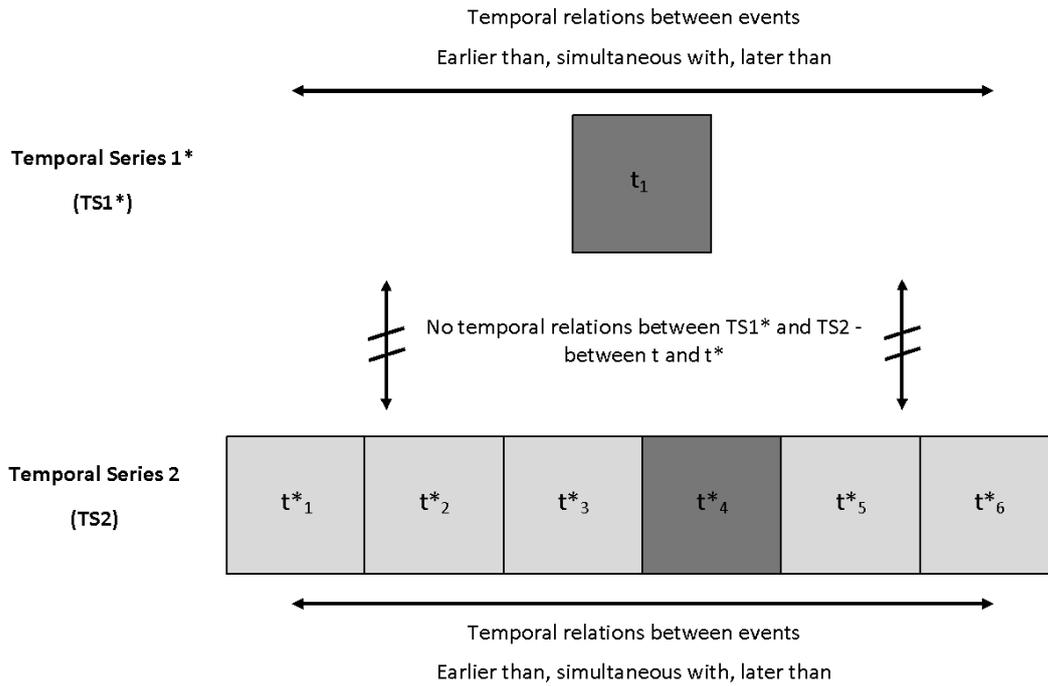
Temporal events pass away (time "passes"), eternal events do not. Events in God's life are permanently present. They are permanent features of reality. This is what makes them eternal, not temporal; God is eternal because such events make up his life. (2002a, 24)<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, harking back to our discussion of discrete timelines, we should not be confused in thinking that God's 'now' or 'present' is the same as ours, for if it were, God would be temporal, not timeless.<sup>22</sup> We can perhaps model this as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> DeWeese seems to worry that having a "present" would make God temporal (2004, 172). However, he does say that an instantaneous now that is not preceded nor succeeded by other instants may do the job (2004, 173). I think this 'instantaneous now' is exactly what Leftow is thinking of. Leftow also points out that other defenders of timelessness, in particular Helm (2010, 28), seem committed to God having the typically temporal property of presentness, and that any view which claims God is living should be so committed (2002a, 25).

<sup>22</sup> That there are two presents, which is clearly seen in this picture, seems to me one of the key things Rogers (2009, 326) misses when trying to understand Leftow's view. If there cannot be two presents then it is impossible that there be two discrete presentist timelines, but this needs to be shown. Leftow further expands on this in his (2018, 184–189).



An implication of this view is that because God's present in TS1\* is not temporally related to any temporal slice in TS2, no ordinary tense used in TS2 will be applicable in TS1\*. As such eternity requires a special tense, something Leftow calls the eternal present tense (1991a, 61–62; 2009, 300). Whilst this may seem mysterious, it shouldn't be, as it's merely a general consequence of discrete timelines (2018, 184–189). Since each timeline cannot have temporal relations with the other, per being discrete, they cannot share the same tense either. The eternal present tense, therefore, just gives a name to the tense God has in His eternal present, which is distinct from the tenses in our world (TS2). Within our temporal domain we can therefore say that God exists, but He exists at no time, since His existence is not temporally indexed to any of our times,<sup>23</sup> but rather He exists at the eternal present.

Eternity also plays another function for Leftow, namely in answering the question "when did God act?," with the answer being "at eternity," and it similarly provides an answer as to "when" God exists. In virtue of providing an answer to these questions, Leftow thinks that we can take eternity to be a date, or at least something that plays the logical role of a date (2001a; 2002a; 2005, 283–284; 1991a, ch. 4). As such, from my worldly standpoint I can say that God exists

<sup>23</sup> To clarify, "exists at no time," when spoken by me, has my ordinary temporal present tense.

at eternity, or in the eternal present, and in doing so state a truth which in no way makes God temporal.<sup>24</sup>

Oppy is no fan of this way of speaking,<sup>25</sup> for he writes,

One might claim that, even though 'God exists' is true, there is no time at which 'God exists' is true. But that seems desperate. From my point of view, here and now, there is no difference between the class of English sentences that are true, and the class of English sentences that are true now. If 'God exists' does not belong to the class of English sentences that are true now, then God does not exist. (2014, 115)

Here, Leftow can respond by claiming that there is, in fact, a difference between what is "true" and what is "true now." I take it that "true now" also means, "presently true," since if we take an A-theoretic view, it is often assumed that "now" and "present" express the same content. But with this in hand, given discrete A-theoretic timelines, it seems that there is a distinction to be had as to what is "presently true" and what is "true." For something being "presently true" refers to something that is true at that present, but something that exists in another discrete present is not true in this present, for it has its own distinct present and therefore its own distinct tense. It is therefore not "now" true, even though there might be a broader, non-tensed sense in which it is "true." Further, given Leftow's understanding of presentism, where presentism concerns what it is to exist, something exists by virtue of being present. Yet if we confine ourselves to our own timeline and think about the status of another discrete timeline, that which exists within that other timeline will not be present within my own, and therefore cannot be said to exist within my own even though it exists in the other timeline in virtue of being present within it. We might therefore dub another notion, namely EXISTENCE, so to say that "EXISTING in a time-series is existing, but not in that series" (Leftow, 2018, 185), and as such we can say from within our timeline that another discrete timeline EXISTS, even if it doesn't exist.<sup>26</sup> Yet with this background, Leftow would likely claim that from within our world, Oppy is in a sense right to say that God does not exist, for He is not present within

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<sup>24</sup> For Leftow's discussion of eternity as a date see (2002a; 2001a; 1991a, ch.4).

<sup>25</sup> It is worth pointing out that even though Oppy does not like this way of speaking, he does suggest that Leftow can get all he needs in another way (2014, 115–116).

<sup>26</sup> Leftow (2018) and my (Page, 2023) spell out this picture in more detail.

our timeline, and as such God only EXISTS. One might think all of this sounds rather odd, but it seems to just be a consequence of speaking with the appropriate tense when considering discrete timelines, as well as the implications of existence presentism, rather than just merely being an objectionable way of thinking about a timeless God.

There is another question we need to answer so to understand what it is for God to be intrinsically timeless, namely how we are to understand the present event of God's life, TS1\*. For should we understand this present as being something with a duration or rather as durationless and point-like?<sup>27</sup>

Talk of God possessing all His life at once conjures up the image that eternity is point-like, not spread out as temporal lives are (Leftow, 1991a, ch.7, 1988, 189–193; 2014, 247–248; 1991d, 175–176, n.8). However, we need to ask whether we can make sense of God having a life on this model, where a life is understood to be a type of state of affairs. Swinburne thinks not, for he argues that instantaneous states of affairs are impossible, and therefore a timeless God, whose life is like an instant, is incoherent (1993, 216). I think this is a mistake, for it seems to me that there can be instantaneous states of affairs, with Leftow providing multiple possible examples of these (2002a, 25–32; 2014; McCann, 2012, 243–244, n.18). Another concern is given by Craig, namely that even if we allow for instantaneous events, with God's life being one of them, then this would imply that God's life doesn't last long but is instead fleeting (1998, 3). However, it seems to me that Leftow has an adequate response to this, for he writes,

the item we are discussing *does* last forever, in its Time: it lasts as long as its Time does. What bothers us is that its forever seems short, and we think being permanent entails lasting a long time . . . . [But] permanence need not entail *lasting* at all . . . . no event in God's life is ever over, or has parts which are ever over. But this is not to say that events in God's life persist forever. They do not persist at all. For an event to persist is for it to have ever-new parts continue it as its earlier parts end. So only events whose parts end persist. Events in God's life simply occur. They do not continue to occur . . . . Temporal events are permanent if *some part of them* is always there. Eternal events are permanent because the whole of them is always there. (2002a, 38–39; 1991a, 131–133)

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<sup>27</sup> Leftow notes that one can find texts that point to both models in Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas (1988, 191; 1991a, 112–113).

Whilst I suspect more could be said about both of these concerns, I think this is sufficient to show that the point-model is *prima facie* coherent, and that we could conceptualise a timeless God's life, which is made up wholly by  $t_1$  in TS1\*, as being only one instant thick.

The other model for understanding God's eternal present is the durational one, with Leftow calling his account "Quasi-Temporal Eternality" (QTE) (1991a, ch.6; 1990b; 1988; 2001b).<sup>28</sup> The idea here is that eternity is *like* an extension in tenseless time, involving earlier and later, yet where nothing passes away or is yet to come. "If this is so, then an eternal being could be one that somehow lives at once (*'tota simul'*) all moments of a life whose moments are ordered as earlier and later." (Leftow, 1991a, 120; 1990b, 126–127) Additionally Leftow claims that we should deny that there are "parts" in eternity, and so eternity is partless, being therefore a partless duration (1991a, 136).<sup>29</sup> The way Leftow argues for this possibility is by offering two analogies.<sup>30</sup> The first appeals to a physical atom as classically conceived, arguing that it is an extended but physically indivisible and partless entity, whilst the second appeals to a chronon, a temporal atom, which is extended in time, and so not an instant, but nonetheless partless (1991a, 137–143; 1991d, 175–176, n.8; 2001b, 199–201; 1990b, 134–138). Supposing these do the job of supporting Leftow's account, we should therefore understand God's life at  $t_1$  as being a partless extended indivisible time.

However, Leftow's discussion of QTE has received much pushback (Padgett 1992, 430; Oppy, 2014, 116–118; Craig, 2001, 37–38; Deng, 2019, 27–29; Quinn, 1996, 132). Yet I don't have anything to say about these objections here, because contrary to what the objectors claim, Leftow makes it explicitly clear that he *doesn't* adopt a duration view of eternity and as such it is not required for his view.<sup>31</sup> For instance, he writes, "I do not opt to defend a durational view of

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<sup>28</sup> Stump and Kretzmann (1981) have also given an account of atemporal duration, albeit one that Leftow has criticised (1991a, 123–137; 1990b, 128–132).

<sup>29</sup> Note that some concerns raised against Leftow stem from his adherence to divine simplicity in *Time and Eternity* (Craig, 2001, 97; DeWeese, 2004, 175; De Florio and Frigerio, 2019, 235–236). However, one should be aware that whilst Leftow has defended simplicity in the past (2006), he no longer holds to a full-blown form of it, given the view of modality he adopts (2012a). Yet the fact that he no longer holds to divine simplicity is no problem for divine timelessness, since timelessness does not entail simplicity (Leftow, 1991a, 70–71).

<sup>30</sup> Leftow (1991a, 137–146) has more to say in arguing for this possibility than I have alluded to here.

<sup>31</sup> This isn't to say that there isn't anything to be said in response to these objections. In his forthcoming book, Leftow (forthcoming) defends the possibility Anselm's version of eternal

eternity" (1991a, 4), and "I do not, however, assert that God has QTE. I regard the latter as a defensible claim . . . . But for the present it is a needless complication" (1991a, 267; 290, n.11; 1991d, 175–176, n.8; 2012a, 13, n.34). It is therefore strange to read that Leftow holds to "some version of atemporal duration" (Mullins, 2016, 65), that Leftow "insists that eternity is a 'duration'," (Padgett, 1992, 430), and that to understand God's timelessness, at least via Leftow, one requires partless extension (Oppy, 2014, 121).<sup>32</sup> This is plain and simple wrong.<sup>33</sup> QTE is not something required by Leftow's theory of divine timelessness, being at most an optional extra.

### How do events in time relate to eternity?

We move to another question that any theory of divine timelessness has to answer, namely as to how events in time relate to eternity. Leftow (1991a) takes what some might consider to be a radical view, claiming that temporal events also occur and are actual in eternity. This view, he suggests, can be found in Anselm, and is what he thinks Boethius and Aquinas *may* mean to say as well (1991a, ch. 9, 1991d, 149; 1990c, 389–390). However, before spelling out this view any further, we might first ask whether we have any good reasons for thinking that temporal events exist in eternity.

Leftow provides at least one reason for this, arguing "From God's Spacelessness to Creatures' Timelessness" by employing what he calls the "Zero

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duration again, and I suggest that the recent flurry of work on the possibility of extended simples (McDaniel, 2007; Ehring, 2011, 25–27), and the continual defence of chronons (Mazzola, 2014; van Bendegem, 2011; Dorato, 2021) might provide us with some hope in thinking both that there are replies and that we can get the analogies going. (Note that the possibility of chronons is often referred to as the possibility of discrete time. Discrete time, however, is different from the notion of discrete timelines, and concerns time being made up out of discrete time atoms.)

<sup>32</sup> Oppy writes, "Either eternity has duration, in which case it is not partless, or else it has neither duration nor temporal parts. Both possibilities are defensible." (2014, 118) Leftow accepts the latter claim, it being the point-model, and *may* affirm the former too, for he writes, "The complexity of partedness of a duration is not identical with and does not obviously entail the complexity of partedness of the thing that has the duration. To this extent, then, God's having durational parts would not necessarily be incompatible with His being simple." (1991a, 136) Yet Leftow doesn't pursue this line of thought further since he chooses to explicate a Boethian picture instead.

<sup>33</sup> This faulty interpretation *seems* to be universally adopted in the God and time literature, with Rogers (2000, 57), Helm (2010, 328), and Ganssle (2023) also reading Leftow in this mistaken way.

Thesis" (1991a, 222–228; 1991d, 161–164).<sup>34</sup> The Zero Thesis, however, is probably the place where Leftow's work has been criticised most frequently, with it being called "bizarre" (Oppy, 2014, 121), "fallacious" (Quinn, 1996, 133), and a "category mistake" (Padgett, 1992, 430; Craig, 2001, 99).<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, for my purposes the details of both the Zero Thesis and its criticisms do not matter, for once again, as with QTE, Leftow's overall theory does not *require* the Zero Thesis. To see this, note that the section of Leftow's work where the Zero Thesis is relevant begins by stating that here he will "argue directly for the most paradoxical part of this position" (1991a, 222; 1991d, 161), namely the claim that temporal events also exist in eternity. However, direct arguments aren't the only type of arguments one can give in favour of a view, and I claim it is available and acceptable for Leftow to give indirect arguments instead.

One indirect argument arises from Leftow's investigation of Stump and Kretzmann's (1981) E-T simultaneity view, which provides another answer as to how events in time relate to eternity.<sup>36</sup> As is well known, Leftow provides a number of criticisms against this view (1991a, ch.8; 1991d; 1988, 205–212),<sup>37</sup> and concludes that the theory he proposes is *preferable* as it does not require problematic causal definitions and involves fewer species of simultaneity (1991a, 182, 1991d, 159–160).<sup>38</sup> From this an indirect argument for adopting Leftow's view can be constructed, namely by asking which of the two theories under consideration explain the difficulty we are addressing in a way that exhibits the most theoretical virtues. If Leftow is correct in his assessment, then his theory comes out best, and so if we adopt a decision-making policy that is based on theoretical virtue maximisation, then Leftow's theory should be preferred and adopted over the E-T simultaneity view. Given that arguing for metaphysical

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<sup>34</sup> It seems Leftow thinks another direct argument could be given for this claim (1991a, 234–235), but I ignore this for sake of brevity.

<sup>35</sup> Criticisms of the zero thesis can be found in all the following works: (Felt, 1994, 528; Padgett, 1992, 430; Deng, 2019, 26; Craig, 2001, 97–101; Quinn, 1996, 132–133; Mann, 1993, 956–958; Oppy, 2014, 118–120; DeWeese, 2004, 170–172).

<sup>36</sup> E-T simultaneity is meant to allow one to say that events really occur sequentially in time and also all at once for God, without it being the case that they really do all occur at once.

<sup>37</sup> Many cite Leftow when claiming that E-T simultaneity isn't possible. However, Leftow says explicitly that his work *does not* "claim to show that no concept of ET-simultaneity is possible." (1990a, 320, n.44) Whilst this reference is earlier than his (1991a), (1991a) is partly based on the paper the quote above comes from, and so I strongly suspect that Leftow still thinks he hasn't argued that E-T simultaneity is impossible.

<sup>38</sup> I don't lay out how Leftow comes to these conclusions due to space.

views based on theoretical virtues is a widespread practice, it seems to me this indirect argument for Leftow's position should be taken seriously.<sup>39</sup>

Another indirect argument for Leftow's view can also be had along the following lines, namely insofar that Leftow is correct that his view vindicates the timelessness response to the freedom foreknowledge problem whilst other views do not (1991a, 163–164, 245–246). Assuming Leftow is right in this, we have another indirect argument for his view, namely that if one thinks that God is timeless and wants an adequate answer to the freedom foreknowledge problem, then one should adopt Leftow's position. I also suspect that Leftow would think there are other benefits in adopting his view,<sup>40</sup> and in virtue of this we could adopt an argumentative strategy that suggests we ought to accept a view as true if the "theoretical benefits are worth it. Provided, of course, that they cannot be had for less." (Lewis, 1986, 135) Leftow, I suggest, may well think all these benefits cannot be had by less, and thus objections of extravagance (Hasker, 2002, 196) are likely to have little force.

In virtue of these indirect arguments, even if Leftow's direct argument that is based on the Zero Thesis fails, we can still give positive reasons for adopting his view. Further, it isn't clear to me that Leftow is even required to give a positive argument here, even if it's generous that he does so. After all, it seems that all that is needed, given the dialectical position we are in, is a picture that shows how it is metaphysically possible for a timeless God to relate to time without Himself becoming temporal. Explicating such a possibility is especially pressing if we take inspiration from the way Boethius and Aquinas often speak (Leftow, 1991a, 160), where God's gains knowledge through some type of "observation," with all temporal events being somehow spread-out to God so that He can observe them all at once from His timeless standpoint.<sup>41</sup> For if temporal events are really present to God, then it seems as though God and temporal events will exist simultaneously, which is something divine timelessness cannot allow, as

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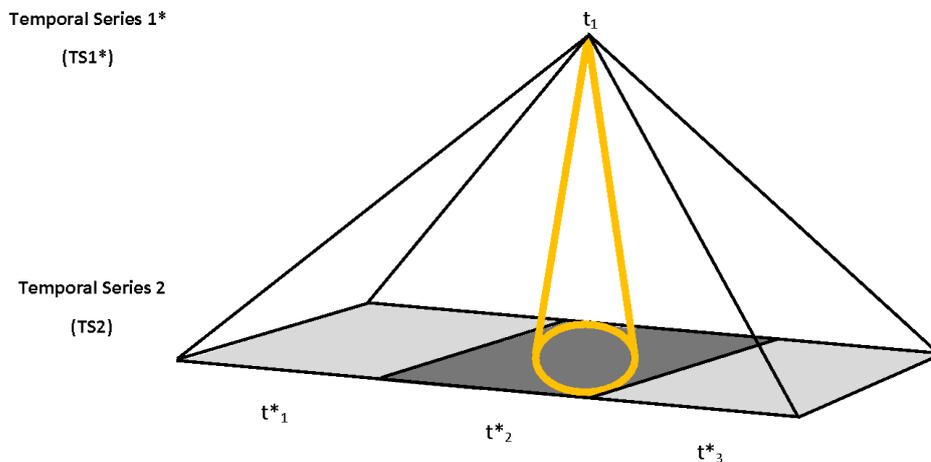
<sup>39</sup> Oppy, given certain positions he holds, might think this form of argument, by its very nature, is stronger than any direct argument Leftow could give (Oppy & Pearce, 2022, ch.4, ch.6).

<sup>40</sup> For instance, Leftow seems to think his view might offer additional resources when it comes to thinking about how a timeless God's action results in consequences for the temporal dimension (1991a, 245).

<sup>41</sup> Note that Leftow is aware that this perceptual model was unlikely to be taken literally by Aquinas (1990a, 306–307) and Boethius (2018, 176, n.13), but he does think the model instructive. Additionally, one shouldn't think Leftow holds that God's knowledge only comes through observation, for he also notes that God can gain knowledge through intuitive insight (1991a, 318–319), and in virtue of being the creator (1991a, 260–266).

being simultaneous with a temporal event, in the standard sense of simultaneous, would render God temporal too (Leftow, 1991a, 161; 1991d, 149–150). Leftow provides us with a picture in which all of this is possible, whereby God isn't simultaneous with temporal events existing in time, but He is simultaneous with these temporal events as they exist in eternity.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, given the dialectic, this is all that Leftow needs to achieve here, and so arguing for the view's plausibility isn't something that needs to be undertaken. As such the Zero Thesis is another one of Leftow's additional extras, and Craig is just mistaken in thinking that "Leftow's entire theory of divine eternity appears to balance like an inverted pyramid on this [the Zero] thesis, so that with the untenability of that thesis the whole theory threatens to topple" (2001, 99).<sup>43</sup>

With this objection rebuffed, how exactly does Leftow think of these temporal events existing in eternity? Here, he follows Anselm in thinking of "eternity *as like* a super-temporal dimension, 'containing' time and temporal entities rather as time 'contains' space and spatial entities." (1991a, 183, 211–212)<sup>44</sup> We can provide a *non-perfect* visual representation of this idea below:



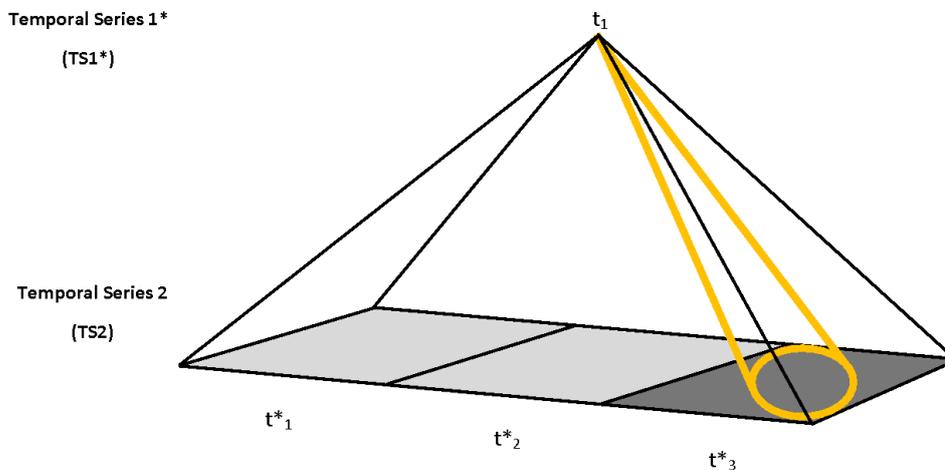
<sup>42</sup> Leftow quotes Anselm to this effect writing, the "*De concordia* asserts that 'eternity has its own simultaneity, in which all things exist which exist at the same time and place and which are diverse in times or places.'" (1991a, 183)

<sup>43</sup> Oppy is similarly incorrect, the Zero Thesis is not *required* in order to understand Leftow's view of divine timelessness (2014, 121).

<sup>44</sup> The italicised 'as like' is not in the original, but I italicise it to show that once more Leftow appeals to a picture or analogy (2009, 315–316), which, whilst not perfect, still provides us with some information as to how we are to conceive a temporal event's relation to eternity (1991a, 263).

Here, if we try to understand the view as analogous to a dimensional coordinate system (1991a, 213–216), we can see that things exist within *both* temporal and eternal dimensions in virtue of having temporal and eternal coordinates.<sup>45</sup> For instance, the yellow object in the image above has a coordinate in temporal series TS2, namely  $t^*_2$  and *also* a coordinate in TS1\*, namely  $t_1$ . Yet, in virtue of sharing an eternal coordinate with God, in our case  $t_1$  in TS1\*, since we are taking this to represent eternity, temporal things are simultaneous with God as He exists at the same coordinate, namely the eternal coordinate. Nevertheless, in virtue of having a temporal coordinate, these temporal things also exist in the temporal dimension and are therefore temporal, although they are not simultaneous with God in this respect, since God is not simultaneous with any time, as He has no temporal coordinates.

Additionally, this way of representing Leftow's idea allows us to picture the thought that one thing can have different coordinates in some dimensions whilst having the same in others. Consider the following image:



Here, we have represented the same yellow object, which now exists at a different temporal coordinate in TS2, namely  $t^*_3$ , even though it continues to exist in the same coordinate in TS1\*, namely  $t_1$ . Notice further, that since  $t_1$  is the only coordinate in TS1\*, for every moment in which it exists in TS2, it will always continue to have the same TS1\* coordinate. One and the same object can,

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<sup>45</sup> Here, and in what follows, I will sometimes speak in terms of “entities” rather than “events.” Nothing significant hangs on this, since an event could be an “entity,” and so I speak this way due to ease of explication.

therefore, have different coordinates in different dimensions. The diagrams, whilst by no means perfect, also hopefully clear up some confusions found in the literature as well, since Rogers (2009) and Mullins (2016, 153, n.93) suggest that they can make no sense of the view. Rogers, for instance, seems to think that the view implies that 'created things exist twice' (2020, 315, n.23), once in eternity and once within time. But this is a mistake; they exist only once but have locations in both eternal and temporal dimensions, as illustrated above. Mullins and Rogers also think the view requires that things "exist in two different ways" (Rogers, 2009, 324, 326) or have "two modes of existence" (Mullins, 2016, 153). It's not totally clear exactly what Rogers and Mullins mean by these phrases, but if they take Leftow's view to require ontological pluralism, then it's far from clear that this is correct, especially given what I said about discrete timelines and ontological pluralism above. Additionally, if they take existing in two different ways or having two modes of existence to mean or imply that the thing in question exists twice, then this too is a mistaken understanding of Leftow's view.

In this picture God exists at  $TS1^*$ , with  $t_1$  being His eternal present or the date of eternity (Leftow, 2006, 301), and the things that exist in time also exist in eternity,  $t_1$ , in virtue of having an eternal coordinate. As all things in eternity exist at  $t_1$  they are simultaneous with God in the eternal present, but as God is not simultaneous with the temporal coordinates of things, since  $TS1^*$  and  $TS2$  are discrete timelines, He is in no way made temporal by their temporality.

Before moving on to discuss how Leftow thinks this view allows us to say that events which occur in eternity are still past, present or future in time, let me briefly answer two objections. Firstly, one might worry that by virtue of temporal things existing in eternity, these things are eternal like God (Hasker, 2002, 197). Leftow replies by following Aquinas, arguing that changeable beings cannot be eternal beings (1990c, 392–393). Whilst an eternal God cannot change, temporal things do. One must remember that Leftow's account says that temporal things exist *both* in the dimension of time *and* in the dimension of eternity, in virtue of having both temporal and eternal coordinates. So even though something may not change in its eternal coordinate, it will still be true to say it changes in its temporal one. God by contrast, only exists in eternity and therefore cannot change at all.

This point, however, allows us to note another feature of Leftow's view, namely that in virtue of a temporal thing having successive parts within time, it will also have parts within eternity (1991a, 237). Yet since we are taking eternity

to be point-like, all these parts will exist in an instant, just as spatial things can have all their spatial parts in an instant. Thus, supposing these objects to be perduring worms, the worm will have parts in eternity, but all these parts will exist at the one instant.<sup>46</sup> However, a timeless God isn't like this, since He has no temporal parts. So, once again, we can distinguish an eternal being from something which exists in eternity.<sup>47</sup>

The second objection asks whether things in eternity end up temporal in virtue of eternity being a super-dimension that contains time. This concern is made more evident from the coordinate system, since if you have a coordinate in the highest dimension then you also have one in the lower dimension as well. As such, although God is located in eternity, the highest dimension, He would seem to also be located in time in virtue of this being a lower dimension. Here the best reply seems to be that the *analogy* breaks down at this point (Leftow, 1991a, 213–214), since a timeless God has no temporal coordinate. Yet, if one recalls what I said at the beginning of the paper concerning God's nature, analogies, and Leftow's aims, I don't think one should be *overly* concerned by this objection and reply.

### Keeping the Temporal Temporal

Yet what might not be clear is how Leftow thinks temporal entities can remain temporal given that they exist in an eternal dimension. The answer to this is that temporal events are temporal in virtue of existing within time, and therefore having a temporal coordinate. Within time, and unlike in eternity, these events do not all occur simultaneously but rather in succession, with one event happening after another. How, then, can we make sense of them being simultaneous in eternity and not simultaneous in time?

Leftow here makes use of the relativity of simultaneity (1991a; 1990c; 1991d; 1990a), and the thought that according to the special theory of relativity (STR), as standardly understood, the question as to whether two events occur at the same time does not have only one answer. Rather, something can be simultaneous

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<sup>46</sup> 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 (1991a, 191–192), and talk of parts is something that three-dimensionalists can arguably employ (Hawthorne, 2006, ch.5).

<sup>47</sup> Leftow (1991a, 235–238; 2009, 303) provides a fuller discussion of the claim that entities existing in eternity needn't be eternal.

according to one reference-frame and not simultaneous according to another, with both answers as to when the event occurred being correct.<sup>48</sup> Thus according to my reference frame, X may be simultaneous with me, since I am travelling close to the speed of light, and yet according to your reference frame, X it is not simultaneous with you, since you are travelling much slower, with X therefore being in your future. For brevity, I won't explain the details as to why this is the case, but one thing we learn from this is that given STR, the relation of being simultaneous is intransitive.<sup>49</sup> That is,

For all x, y and z, if x is somehow simultaneous with y and y is somehow simultaneous with z, we cannot infer that x is somehow simultaneous with z. For it could be that x is simultaneous with y in one reference-frame, y is simultaneous with z in another and there is no third frame of reference in which x and z are simultaneous. (Leftow, 1991d, 153)

Additionally, Leftow contends that if we are presentists about time, we should think that STR and the relativity of simultaneity shows us that present-actuality is also relative (1991a, 232–235, 333–335; 1990c, 391–392; 1991d, 165–168; 1990a, 318–321).<sup>50</sup> He says,

If present actuality is ontologically special, then as there is no absolute simultaneity and so no absolute, framework-independent now, there is no absolute present actuality. There is merely present actuality in this framework and that; things are not just actual-*simpliciter* or not, but are actual-in-R, actual-in-R\* and so on. (1991d, 167)

Thus, when my reference frame, X, is simultaneous with me, and therefore present to me, we should say that X is presently-actual relative to my frame of reference, since, in your frame of reference X is not simultaneous with you, being in your future, and therefore not presently-actual to you. Present-actuality is therefore relative to reference frames.

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<sup>48</sup> Leftow defines a reference frame minimally, as 'an *inertial frame of reference* is a system of objects at rest relative to one another.' (Leftow, 1991a, 166)

<sup>49</sup> Leftow (1991a; 1990c; 1991d; 1990a) explains this, but for a fuller introductory philosophical explication see (Baron & Miller, 2019, ch.4; Maudlin, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> This also seems to be implied from what he says in his (2018).

With this as background, Leftow claims that we think of eternity *as like* another reference frame which has its own atemporal/eternal simultaneity where all events occur at once within this reference frame. There can be no temporal frame like this, where all temporal events occur simultaneously, for as Leftow says, causal relations place constraints on simultaneity which restrict this from occurring (1991a, 219; 1990a, 320–321). As such it is *only in* the eternal reference frame that all events exist simultaneously. Additionally, since Leftow claims present-actuality is reference frame relative, we are able to say that only relative to the atemporal/eternal reference frame are all events presently-actual.

Yet, given the intransitivity of simultaneity, these events need not be simultaneous in other reference frames, and given that temporal events also exist in temporal reference frames, in virtue of their temporal coordinates, it will also be correct to say that relative to a temporal reference frame some events are simultaneous whilst others are past and others future. Once we add to this that present-actuality is reference frame relative, we can see that given the multiple temporal reference frames there are, there will be multiple present-actualities, with none being in principle privileged over any other.

Putting all this together we can say that to God, in His atemporal reference frame, all temporal events are simultaneous to Him and so presently-actual relative to Him. Yet, within time, temporal events are simultaneous relative to some reference frames, and therefore presently-actual in them, and not simultaneous relative to others, and therefore not presently-actual in them. As such all temporal events occur and are presently-actual at once within eternity, even though it's also true to say that they don't all occur at once within time, and therefore are not all presently-actual within time, with some being past and others future.<sup>51</sup> Given this, Anselm's claim that "in time something is not present which is present in eternity . . . my action of tomorrow (does not) exist today, even though it always exists in eternity" (Anselm, *De Concordia* I. 5, 2016, 540), makes sense.

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<sup>51</sup> This summary, as well as thinking about discrete timelines, should hopefully provide the resources for answering Rogers question: 'On Leftow's view, my future choice does not exist in 2009 (now), but it exists in eternity. . . . But on a presentist view, how can that be? On the presentist view the future does not exist. As of now I have not made the choice, and if the outcome of the choice is absolutely up to me, how can the outcome exist in eternity, such that it is true to say now that it exists in eternity and that God knows what it will be?' (2009, 325)

I think this whole strategy is ingenious, but others are less impressed, with Craig calling it “pseudo-scientific” (2001, 135). As far as I can tell, there have been three main objections to this aspect of Leftow’s thought, with the first two coming from its use of STR.

The first objection concerns God’s eternal frame of reference, with Craig claiming, “there just does not seem to be any such ‘frame of reference’ in which all events are simultaneous. Certainly there is no such physical reference frame” (2001, 102; DeWeese, 2004, 174). That there is no *physical* reference frame of this sort is something I’m sure Leftow would accept, since I suspect Leftow would think of “physical reference frame” as synonymous with “temporal reference frame,” and as I’ve already noted, Leftow says there is no temporal reference frame of this sort. As such, Leftow must have in mind a reference frame that is beyond being “physical.” Perhaps the thought therefore is that STR *rules out* a reference frame of this kind, in virtue of STR being a *physical* theory and so Leftow’s appeals to STR are misplaced? One might, therefore, contend that Leftow’s model is formulated in the guise of a scientific theory, but in reality goes beyond what the scientific theory itself states, and this is inappropriate.

I, however, deny it’s inappropriateness. As I noted at the outset of this paper, when thinking about God the best we can typically do is appeal to some type of picture or analogue, which is far from perfect, and claim that God is in some respects like the picture/analogue we’re using.<sup>52</sup> This seems to be exactly what is happening here, and one can read Leftow as thinking the same. For instance, at one point he writes, we should take “eternity to be *like* a frame of reference in addition to any temporal reference frames” (1991d, 153; 1991a, 167), elsewhere he states, “I suggest that Aquinas treats eternity as in effect one more frame of reference, *analogous* to temporal frames of reference” (1990c, 390), and finally he comments that “eternity is a timeless *analogue* of an inertial frame of reference” (1990a, 317).<sup>53</sup> In light of this, as far as I can see there is no “direct” appeal to STR in the sense that what we are saying about God is exactly like the science of STR, but rather an appeal to the thought that what we want to say about God is pretty similar to what we say about STR, so much so that it can help us conceive of what God’s relationship to the world is like and in providing us with some reason to

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<sup>52</sup> I discuss this further in Page (manuscript b).

<sup>53</sup> The italics in the first quote are Leftow’s, but they are mine in other two quotes. Note also that in the first quote Leftow is introducing Stump and Kretzmann’s view on reference frames. This is a view he then employs, albeit without endorsing ET-simultaneity.

think this is a metaphysically possible way in which God can be related to the world. As I've indicated before, I think this is plenty good enough within discussions of God's nature.

Nonetheless, one can also respond to this concern by denying that there is an eternal reference frame, since Leftow seems able to get what he needs without affirming this. To see this recall that Leftow thinks eternity is a single location,  $t_1$ , and that all temporal events exist within eternity by virtue of having an eternal coordinate. Yet as there is only one location in eternity,  $t_1$ , all events existing in eternity must be simultaneous with each other since in eternity there is no other location at which they could exist. This gives Leftow the claim that all events are simultaneous in eternity without the need for an eternal reference frame. Yet Leftow can still hold that STR tells us that simultaneity is intransitive, so that what is simultaneous in eternity need not be simultaneous in time, and also that STR informs us that present-actuality is relative, being relative to what is simultaneous with one's self. In God's case, what is simultaneous to Him is all events that have an eternal coordinate, whilst what is simultaneous with myself are some temporal events. The reference-frame-in-eternity move, is therefore, one that Leftow can drop if he wishes, and also isn't required in order for his view to work.

The second STR related objection, takes issue with Leftow's claim that actuality is relative to reference frames. Whilst objectors haven't taken this to be impossible, they do suggest that it is enormously improbable and unbelievable (Craig, 2001, 106; Padgett, 1992, 430). I have some sympathy with this sentiment, since it seems the picture Leftow sketches is rather odd. But *prima facie* STR seems rather odd as well, and I would say the same about some other physical theories too. Additionally, I often think the views that square presentism with STR are rather strange, but I'm not sure that this is a strong enough reason for thinking they should be rejected. So I'm not persuaded that the oddness of Leftow's way of squaring things gives me a *strong* reason against his view, especially since I agree with Hudson that "It is a common but almost never compelling critique to accuse someone of holding a crazy metaphysics. That is scarcely alarming ... *metaphysics is a crazy business.*" (2014, 15) Further, the fact that this type of position has been suggested by several philosophers of time gives me some reason to think that perhaps it's not too bad after all (Effingham & Miller, 2023, 91–94;

Hawley, 2009, 510; Baron & Miller, 2019, 108–110),<sup>54</sup> and at least makes me sceptical of Craig’s claim that Leftow’s appeal to STR, “evinces a certain naiveté concerning the philosophical foundations of the received physical interpretation of Relativity Theory and an uncritical acceptance of that interpretation” (2001, 107). In light of this, I don’t think this objection is particularly compelling either.

The final major objection concerns the ordering of events within God’s life. The difficulty, so it is argued, is that Leftow holds that all temporal events *are* simultaneous within eternity, in virtue of all temporal events having an eternal dimension and the same eternal coordinate.<sup>55</sup> Yet in light of this it is thought that from God’s eternal perspective all of the temporal relations exhibited in time disappear, and so one may wonder “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.” (De Florio & Frigerio, 2019, 238; DeWeese, 2004, 173–174) Craig therefore asserts that on Leftow’s view, events in God’s eternal present “are chaotically co-existent.” (2001, 105)

There is much to say in response to this objection and elsewhere I have suggested several responses to this objection (Page, manuscript c). Here let me briefly note that on Leftow’s view the whole entity that we are considering exists *both* in eternity and in time, rather just a part existing in time and a part in eternity. As such, if the entity has properties, such as “being earlier than Y within Creation’s timeline,” then this 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 in both time and eternity. God, therefore, just needs to know that the entity has these properties, and from this, He can know that the entity in question is temporally ordered in such and such way

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<sup>54</sup> This isn’t to say that all these theorists adopt the view, since they don’t. But they also don’t adopt presentist views of time either. I also suspect there are other people who adopt similar views, since I take Leftow’s proposal to be a form of external relativism (Fine, 2005, 278; 2006), and there are additional theorists who hold to this view referenced in Fine (2005, 279, n.10; 2006, 414, n.4). Additionally, it may be that Leftow’s view is compatible with fragmentalism too (De Florio & Frigerio, 2019, 237) in which case there will be even further advocates of this view of time. Leftow himself does reference Fine’s work approvingly (2022, 39), but never states in writing which view he adopts, or, given the context, which view Anselm adopts, although though he has said to me in personal correspondence that it is the external relativist view.

<sup>55</sup> This doesn’t mean that because events are ordered one way in one life, they cannot be ordered another way in other lives. As Leftow notes, we can tell consistent time travel stories where this is the case (2018, 182–183).

within time, even though within eternity the entity exists simultaneously with all other entities and so stands in no such temporal relations in eternity. Thus, whilst it is true there is no temporal order within eternity, it's not as if the entity in question thereby loses the temporal properties it has within time. This is just the view. 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.<sup>56</sup> As such, this too isn't an objection that I think threatens Leftow's view.

## Conclusion

Oppy, closes his remarks on Leftow's view of God's relationship to time writing,

If it is really true that an understanding of God's timelessness requires so many bizarre doctrines – degrees of existence, partless extension, the Zero Thesis, ... and so on – then the upshot is likely to be a *reductio* of the claim that God is timeless, and perhaps also one horn of an argument by dilemma against the existence of God. (Either God is timeless or God is not timeless ...) For this reason, it seems to me that theists ought to look favourably on attempts to explain how God could be timeless which do not invest in these doctrines. (2014, 121)<sup>57</sup>

Given what I've shown in this paper, theists can follow Oppy's advice whilst also adopting Leftow's account, since Oppy is just wrong in thinking that Leftow's theory requires degrees of existence, partless extension, and the Zero Thesis. I have also sought to show that many of the other prominent objections to Leftow's account are also either based on mistakes, able to be bypassed, or have available replies, with much of this being achieved by merely spelling out clearly the fundamentals of Leftow's view. By doing this I hope to have shown what exactly it is that would be needed to be objected to in order to demonstrate that Leftow's view is mistaken, and whilst this may be achieved in the future, given what I've said here, I'm sceptical that it's been accomplished at present.

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<sup>56</sup> In (Page, manuscript c) I show how God can know the temporal order on Leftow's view, even if one was to deny the option given here.

<sup>57</sup> Oppy also talks of principle-T, which refers to Leftow's talk of something being true at no time, and that I talked to earlier in the paper, but this is something that even Oppy thinks Leftow can do without, as I noted in footnote 25.

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