

This is the penultimate version of a paper due to appear in Oaklander, L.N. (ed.), *Debates in the Metaphysics of Time* (New York/London: Bloomsbury) (forthcoming in 2014)

DIVINE EVENTS*

Joseph Diekemper

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to approach the question of God's temporality via a study of the nature of events. If events are necessarily extended entities involving change, then there is no such thing as a non-temporal event. And if God is necessarily the subject of such events, then he is necessarily temporal. In Section 1 I will defend the essentially temporality of events, and in Section 2 I will consider various ways of conceiving of divine events, concluding that these necessarily exist.

1.0 The Ontology of Events

In this section I will argue that we do not have good reason to allow instantaneous events into our ontology, and therefore that events should be conceived as essentially temporal and extended entities which involve change.¹

Why think that events cannot be instantaneous? For the simple and common sense reason that events are, intuitively, processes of change. Lombard (1986) has argued that events are processes of change; and it certainly is integral to the common sense concept of an

* Earlier versions of this chapter were presented in conferences at Queen's University Belfast and Cambridge University, and I am grateful to the audiences at those events for their stimulating and helpful comments. I am particularly grateful to Brian Leftow for written comments on an early draft. I would also like to acknowledge the John Templeton Foundation, whose support made possible the research for this chapter.

¹ Here I will be treating the question of whether events are necessarily processes of change as equivalent to the question of whether events are necessarily extended. This treatment assumes that there could be no temporally extended *unchanges*. I argue for this assumption in Diekemper (book manuscript).

event—or ‘happening’—that it involve change.² But while common sense may be a good starting point in metaphysics, it can only take us so far. Once we start applying a little metaphysical pressure to a common sense concept, we often find that the concept cannot hold up under the strain, and that it requires some revision. So even if we normally conceive of events as processes of change, is this necessarily the case? Leftow (2002) has argued that events need not be extended, and therefore that they need not involve change. Clearly, change cannot occur at an instant, so if an event can occur at an instant, then events are not necessarily processes of change. So Leftow applies some metaphysical pressure to the notion that events cannot be instantaneous, and concludes that this notion is mistaken. This paves the way for him to argue that God can be the subject of an instantaneous, timeless event; and this, in turn, helps to provide a coherent conception of Boethius’ notion of the divine ‘eternal present’. Leftow brings four main points to bear against the thesis that events cannot be instantaneous. I will consider these in turn, and will conclude that the common sense conception of events as essentially temporally extended entities can hold up against the pressure Leftow applies to it.

1.1 Instantaneous velocity

First, Leftow considers the case of motion (Leftow, *op. cit.*, p. 26). We can take any instantaneous slice of a given motion (such as my walking from A to B) and claim that that slice is a temporal part of the event that is my walking from A to B. There is, for example, an instant at which I am midway between A and B, and my being in that position at that instant is a part of my walking from A to B. But, according to Leftow, a temporal part of an event

² Cleland (1991) also argues that events are processes of change, but her account, unlike Lombard’s, allows for the possibility of non-spatial events, since she does not identify material objects as the subjects of change; rather, she identifies determinable tropes, which change in respect of the determinate properties they exemplify, as the subjects of change.

can only be an event itself. Events only have events as temporal parts, and motions only have movings (which are events) as temporal parts. Why think that my instantaneously being midway between A and B is a moving? Because, according to Leftow, I have an instantaneous velocity at that point, and obviously only objects that move have velocity. So the instantaneous slice of my motion is an instantaneous moving and is therefore an event.

But is there any reason to think that instantaneous velocity, which is introduced in a scientific context by special definition in terms of limits, is an actual velocity possessed by an object at an instant? Suppose I reach the midway point between A and B at time t . And suppose we measure my velocity over increasingly smaller and smaller intervals of time ending at t , and these measurements get closer and closer to 1 m/s. Further, suppose that we measure my velocity over increasingly smaller and smaller intervals of time *beginning* at t ; and suppose that these measurements also get closer and closer to 1 m/s. This, according to definition, yields an instantaneous velocity of 1 m/s at time t . But note that the definition is given *in terms of* intervals of time, and that it is *over* intervals of time that the velocity is actually measured. Furthermore, notice that the definition treats the instant t not as containing an event, but as the bounding point of intervals *over which* velocity is measured. Although the definition is neutral with respect to the ontological status of events, it nonetheless treats instantaneous velocity as a purely theoretical concept derived from velocities measured over temporal intervals; thus the definition does not support the inference from an instantaneous velocity to an instantaneous moving. Given how instantaneous velocities are defined, Swinburne (1994) argues that we should not think that they are somehow discovered with the use of limits; rather, according to Swinburne, an instantaneous velocity is *just* a limit of velocities measured over series of intervals—intervals which are bounded by the instant to which the instantaneous velocity is, by definition, attributed (Swinburne, *op. cit.*, p. 73).

If this is correct, then there seems little reason to suppose that instants are temporal parts of events. In fact, it seems wholly implausible that some contiguous set of instants of zero duration could somehow add up to an interval or event of non-zero duration. If, however, instants are merely the bounding points of temporal intervals, then there is no pressure to admit instantaneous events into our ontology (other than, perhaps, as theoretical entities).³

1.2 Succeeding events

So Swinburne endorses (what I am calling) the common sense view, according to which instants are merely the bounding points of temporal intervals, and things happen over temporal intervals, rather than at instants. Leftow, however, puts further pressure on the common sense view by claiming that the instantaneous moving, which he takes to be part of a motion, can be thought of as the successful culmination of a process which leads up to being at that location. And this, according to Leftow, ‘sounds like an event’ (Leftow, *ibid.*). The thought is that, in ordinary language, we speak of reaching a particular place (such as my reaching the midway point between A and B), where the reaching implies succeeding; and, according to Leftow, a succeeding is an event. Thus, a perfectly legitimate answer to the question, ‘what happened at t’ is, ‘I reached the midway point between A and B at t’. So reaching there must be an instantaneous event which happened at t.

Leftow acknowledges that there is another way of describing the same situation: perhaps reaching there *only* refers to the event involving changes leading up to *being there*. But *being there* is not an event, it is a state ‘which terminates the events leading up to my

³ On instantaneous events as theoretical entities, see Simons (2003, p. 377). In written comments Leftow has cited, as grounds for endorsing instantaneous events, the causal work done by such events on a presentist conception of time. I grant that for presentism to be viable it probably requires instantaneous events with causal powers, but I do not think presentism is viable. See Diekemper (2005) and (2013).

being there' (*ibid.*). So here we have two different ways of describing the same situation, one of which characterizes my location at *t* as an instantaneous event, and the other which characterizes it merely as the terminus of an event. How shall we decide between these two characterizations? It's not clear that ordinary language is going to help us adjudicate in these kinds of ontological disputes. If we took the ontological commitments of ordinary language at face value, we would have a far more bloated ontology than most of would be prepared to allow. Yes, we can say things like, 'it happened that I reached that point at that instant,' without offending the ear. But just as most of us would not want to allow the existence of a property for every predicate of language, we also should not affirm the existence of an event for every linguistically proper use of the verb 'to happen'. Events are concrete particulars which serve as the relata of causal relations, and are therefore more course grained than mere facts, which have a one to one correspondence with every true, linguistically correct description of reality (i.e. a different description corresponds to a different fact). So just as one and the same event can admit of several different descriptions, without implying that more than one event is being referred to; so, too, not every true, linguistically correct description which sounds like an event is an event.⁴ What we should ask ourselves is what our fundamental theory of the world commits us to; and while we should not avoid an abundant ontology as a matter of principle, we should endeavour to reduce our ontological commitments wherever doing so does not reduce the explanatory power of our theory. Given

⁴ There are a lot of issues lurking in the background here, which I do not have the space to address. Bennett (1988) and Lowe (1998) argue that events should not be assimilated to facts, but Bennett thinks facts can still play a causal role, as does Mellor (1995). Although Kim (1976) rejects fact causation and does not assimilate events to facts, the result of his version of the property exemplification view is that events are nearly as fine grained as facts. I assume, however, in view of how Leftow intends to employ events, that he would agree to the categorical distinction between events and facts, and that he would reject fact causation.

this desideratum, does the explanation of my reaching the midway point between A and B really require both the event of my travelling from A to the midpoint of AB, *and* the event of my arriving at the midpoint of AB (at t)? Or does it only require that the former event terminate at time t? I submit that the ontological parsimony of the latter explanation is, for that reason, more virtuous.

There is a potential worry, however, with this line of argumentation. I am claiming that my location at t is the terminus of an event involving my walking from A to the specified location, and as such does not constitute a distinct event. Can we not, however, conceive of a possible world which consists only in my being at that location at t, and nothing else? And if such a world is possible, then what should we say about the ontological status of that instant? If it is just the terminus of an event which, *ex hypothesi*, does not exist, then it appears that the instant also cannot exist.⁵ But would I really wish to claim that the described world is not possible? My answer is that there might be possible worlds in which objects admit of properties and relations which never change, but that there is no sense in which anything occurs in such worlds, and therefore no sense in which time exists in such worlds.⁶ So if there is a world in which I am located at the midpoint between A and B, but in which nothing ever happens, then there are neither temporal instants nor events in that world (see Section 1.4, below).

1.3 Coming to be

Leftow's next point focuses on the notion of coming to be. He argues that coming to be can only be a change if it is a change in the entity that comes to be; but, since the entity that comes to be does not exist until the instant at which the process of coming to be is complete, coming to be cannot be a change in the entity that comes to be. Thus, coming to be is an

⁵ Thanks to Brian Leftow for raising this worry in written comments.

⁶ So if God is necessarily temporal, such worlds are *not* possible.

instantaneous event. Suppose, for example, that x comes to be at t . Prior to t , x does not exist; subsequent to t , x already exists. So x 's coming to be is not a change in the individual x that comes to be. Thus t cannot be conceived as the terminal instant of an extended event (i.e. x 's coming to be), since there is no subject of change prior to t . Therefore coming to be is an instantaneous event, since t is the first instant of x 's existence.

My response to this argument is to claim that it conflates qualitative change with substantial change. Obviously x 's coming to be is not a process of qualitative change, since x does not exist to undergo change during the process of its coming to be. But clearly *something* is changing in the coming to be of a new individual. For Aristotle, coming to be is a case of substantial change, since it involves the coming into existence of a substance that did not previously exist. So what is the subject of change in a case of substantial change? It is the matter of which x is formed. If x is a member of the substantial kind K , then x 's coming to be is a change in the matter which eventually constitutes x —that change being the instantiation of the substantial kind K . So x 's coming to be is not something which happens to x , but it is something which happens to x 's matter, and thus it is a temporally extended event involving change. Of course, we could characterize x 's coming to be as a process involving substantial change, and at the same time characterize x 's coming to be (at t) as the successful completion of that process, and therefore as an instantaneous event. Again, however, the latter is merely a linguistic characterization, and it is one that does no ontological work (given the argument in Section 1.2).

Leftow considers three examples in this context: one is the first moment of time, one is the coming to be of the universe according to Big Bang cosmology, and the third is the coming to be of Michelangelo's David (*ibid.*: pp. 27-28). Leftow takes all three examples to be of a par, and the notion of coming to be to be a perfectly general one. However, given my response to his argument, it is not clear that I can treat all three examples as involving the

same kind of event. It is one thing to analyze David's coming to be as a case of substantial change in David's matter, it is another to analyze the first moment of time or the coming to be of the universe as a case of substantial change—substantial change in what? Setting aside, for the moment, the example of the first moment of time, I will focus first on the example from Big Bang cosmology. According to that cosmology (and according to the theological doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*), there is no matter prior to the existence of the universe, and therefore no potential subject of change. This entails, according to Leftow, that the universe's coming to be is not a change but an instantaneous event. There are two ways to consider the metaphysics of this situation: one is atheologically, and the other theologically.

Atheologically, either the initial appearance of the singularity—from which the universe expanded—was a contingent, yet uncaused, cause, or it was an effect of some prior event (for example, the big crunch of an earlier universe). Only on the *former* construal would it be true to say that the first moment of the universe was an instantaneous event; since on the *latter* construal, the appearance of the 'original' singularity is the terminus of an event whose origin is the big crunch of an earlier universe. But how plausible *is* the former construal? If the scientific explanation for any event or state is made by reference to its causal antecedents (a plausible assumption), then the existence of an original, contingent, yet uncaused, cause would entail the impossibility of explaining all that is causally downstream from the event. This strikes me as a particularly unpalatable option for those engaged in atheological explanation, since it blocks a certain response to the cosmological argument. Proponents of that argument will claim that atheists are unable to ultimately explain existence. In response, atheists will say it suffices for explanation to be able to explain any event in terms of earlier events—that is as 'ultimate' an explanation as is required. Clearly, this response loses its force if there is a contingent, first cause.

Furthermore, although Leftow speaks in terms of the ‘appearance’ of the Big Bang singularity, and I have retained that language above for the sake of argument, it may misrepresent the actual Big Bang cosmological models. Halvorson and Kragh (2011) claim that in the singular spacetime models which most closely model our universe, if t_0 is the absolute lower bound of the time parameter t , then as t decreases towards t_0 , ‘ t_0 is an ideal point that is never reached: the universe exists at all times after t_0 , but not before or at time t_0 ’. Thus, on these models, there is no initial state of the singularity or first moment of time, even though the universe is finitely old; there is only a first *interval* of time. This would entail that, from the atheological perspective, neither the Big Bang example nor the first moment of time example can do the work that Leftow intends them to. In any event, given the context of Leftow’s argument, as one in which conceptual room is being made for the notion of a divine ‘eternal present’, atheological considerations are not, perhaps, terribly relevant.

Considering the metaphysics of the situation from the theological perspective, the appearance of the singularity is, once again, either an original singularity, or it is an effect of some earlier cosmic event (big crunch, etc). In either case, however, God is the ultimate, necessary cause of whatever is the genuine original singularity (we are assuming, for the sake of the argument for instantaneous events, that there was such an entity). One question here is how we should characterize the change—if, as I maintain, it is a change—involved in the first act of creation. It cannot be substantial change in the Aristotelian sense, since there exists nothing material prior to the appearance of the original singularity. Leftow considers and rejects the thought that the first act of creation would be a change in the ‘way things are’, and I think he is correct that this is too diffuse a notion to serve as the subject of change. But what about God? Before his first act of creation he has never created (trivially), so can’t his first act of creation be a (relational) change in him? Well, this description of the first act of

creation entails that God is temporal, and that is ultimately what is at stake here. Similar worries about circularity attend the example of the first moment of time, since a first moment of time is only plausible on the assumption that God is atemporal: if God is necessarily eternal and temporal, and time is necessarily unified, then there could be no first moment of time.

The lesson here is, I think, that the examples of creation *ex nihilo* and the first moment of time (from the theological perspective) cannot be used to demonstrate either the possibility or impossibility of instantaneous events. One must *assume* a conception of divine eternity in order to employ the examples in such a way, and the conclusions reached bear directly *on* the nature of divine eternity.

1.4 Changeless instants

In the final argument I wish to consider, Leftow takes the occurrence of an instant to be an instantaneous event which does not involve change. He argues that the only way to deny this is to endorse the reduction of time to actual events and their relations. According to Leftow, however, this reduction has the consequence that ‘nothing could have occurred at any time save what actually did occur then,’ and this is not plausible (*ibid.*, p. 32).⁷ I will argue that the reduction of time to actual events and their relations can avoid this alleged ramification, and thus that this should not be cited as a reason to reject the reduction. And as Leftow acknowledges, if one *were* to reduce time in this manner, then one can reject the claim that changeless instants occur.⁸

I will start my argument by acknowledging agreement with Leftow on his main point in this context. He argues that the reduction of time to actual events and their relations

⁷ Le Poidevin (1993) makes the same point.

⁸ I argue in Diekemper (book manuscript) that there are good, positive reasons to reduce time to actual events and their relations.

(henceforth 'TR' (Temporal Reductionism)) entails essentialism about times. If times are nothing more than simultaneous sets of events then the events simultaneous with any given time t are essential to t . Thus t does not exist in worlds in which the set of events which actually comprise t does not exist. So, suppose in the actual world @ that I drive to Donaghadee at t . Now suppose that in some other, very close possible world w , I instead drive to Bangor, where my driving to Bangor is simultaneous with all the events in w that my driving to Donaghadee is simultaneous with in @. Since my driving to Donaghadee at t is an essential constituent of t , t does not exist in w , and so it is not true in w that I drive to Bangor at t . So I agree with Leftow that this essentialism about times cannot allow for alternative possibilities to obtain at times that are transworld identical.

But shouldn't our metaphysics allow for this? Well, certainly our metaphysics should allow for claims such as, 'I might have driven to Bangor at t ,' and the question is whether essentialism about times can allow for *that* claim without transworld identity for times. I think it can by employing the concept of a counterpart.⁹ A modal counterpart to an actual individual is an individual existing in some other possible world which bears a relation of similarity to the actual individual. The closer the world, the closer the relation of similarity. The modal counterpart in w of actual time t is the time at which I drive to Bangor instead of driving to Donaghadee (call it t^w). So the claim, 'I might have driven to Bangor at t ' is true in virtue of my driving to Bangor in w at t^w ; and I think that this is all that is required to allow that things might have gone differently. So although alternative possibilities cannot obtain at (strictly) identical times, they can obtain at times that are otherwise identical to actual times (otherwise but for the non-occurrence of the event actually occurring at that time). Finally, it is important to stress that this account of counterpart times need not buy into the counterpart

⁹ I thank Dean Zimmerman for this suggestion.

theory of modal realism. If one endorses transworld identity for other kinds of individuals, and rejects modal realism and the indexicality of actuality, then one may continue to do so while acknowledging that there are counterparts to actual times.

What we have seen in this section is that the common sense view that events are processes of change can withstand the sustained metaphysical pressure that Leftow brings to bear on it. And if events are processes of change, then they are temporally extended entities; that is, there are no non-temporal events. Assuming that one accepts the common sense status I have accorded the thesis that events are processes of change, then this section provides considerable evidence in favour of the thesis.

2.0 Divine Events

Given the conclusion of Section 1, if God is a subject of events, then God is temporal.¹⁰ In other words, if divine events exist, then God is in time. There are several concerns associated with the concept of a divine event, but most of these stem from the worry that God can only be the subject of an event in virtue of his interaction with creation, since it would be inappropriate and overly anthropomorphic to characterize God's mental life as involving discrete, ordered events. Furthermore, the objector will note that even if we assume God's mental life to involve events, and take this to imply that God is temporal, then we must say that God waited an infinite amount of time before creation (since a temporal God's life extends an infinite amount of time into the past). Absent some principled reason for why God would wait an infinite amount of time to create, the objector concludes that it is absurd, and that we should therefore reject the initial assumption. I will consider three different responses to this set of concerns: the possibility of coeternal creation; the possibility of

¹⁰ It is another question in what sense is God temporal. I address this issue in Diekemper (book manuscript).

changeless time prior to creation; and the possibility that reflection on God's nature as a person can answer the objections.

2.1 Coeternal creation

According to the standard theistic view, God is the creator, but suppose that his being creative is not an accidental property; i.e., suppose that he is essentially creative. Perhaps, then, he would not await an infinite amount of time to create. The objector argues from the absurdity of God waiting an infinite amount of time to create to the conclusion that he must be timeless. But if God *is* temporal, *and* he does not have a principled reason for delaying creation, then surely it is possible that he did not delay; that is, he must always have been creating. Clearly, if we take the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and Big Bang cosmology seriously, with their implications of a finitely old universe, then *our* universe cannot be coeternal with God.¹¹ But this hardly rules out coeternal creation, since God's creative activities could go well beyond our own universe. If God is temporal, presumably he created the heavenly places and its denizens (e.g. angels) before he created our universe. But if his creative activities are to fill an infinite past, then there must surely have been more than this. For this reason, the doctrine of coeternal creation seems to imply the existence of a multiverse: God has been creating other universes for an infinite amount of time. If coeternal creation can be made sense of, then one could claim both that God is the subject of temporal events (in virtue of his interaction with his creation), and that there is no puzzle about why he waited to create. There are, however, some potential pitfalls to this approach. For one thing, there is a concern about whether a temporal God's ontological priority can be confirmed

¹¹ Interestingly, however, Halvorson and Kragh (2011) report the observation of Misner that the finite/infinite time distinction 'might lack intrinsic physical or theological significance.' According to Misner, even in spacetime models that begin with singularities, 'the Universe is meaningfully infinitely old because infinitely many things have happened since the beginning'.

unless he also has temporal priority over his creation. Secondly, if God has always been creating, then perhaps there are an infinite number of universes among the multiverse, and this seems problematic. I will consider these two problems in turn.

First, I suppose the defender of coeternal creation would urge us to get away from thinking, ‘first God existed, then he created,’ in order to affirm his ontological priority over creation. It’s not as though God came into existence, then decided to create, he has always been existing, so (perhaps) he has always been creating. Augustine attributes the doctrine of coeternal creation to the Platonists, though the context there is different, since they are defending the view that the human soul is coeternal with God (City of God, bk. 10, ch. 31).¹² But Augustine provides them with a helpful analogy: a foot eternally planted in the dust. There is no temporal priority of the foot and the footprint if they are coeternal, but there seems to be no question that the print was formed by the pressure of the foot: without the foot, there could not have been a print. In this way, the creation might ontologically depend upon God, even though some of the creation is coeternal with God (again, even if not our universe, then some universes, and presumably angels). Furthermore, the Thomistic doctrine of *creatio continuans* could be employed here to help preserve God’s ontological priority over a coeternal creation. According to this doctrine, God’s causing things to exist is a matter of him continually sustaining them wholly by his power. If that power were removed by God, then the creation would cease to exist. This seems to imply that the causal relation between God and his creation is primarily metaphysical and not temporally ordered from

¹² Cf. Zimmerman (2002, p. 78 and n. 17).

earlier than to later than, in which case, God does not require temporal priority over his creation in order to have ontological priority.¹³

The second worry, however, seems more problematic. If God has been creating for an infinite amount of time, then this implies that his creation is infinitely old. Since we have good reason to believe that *our* universe is not infinitely old, and since, as I argued above, coeternal creation implies the existence of a multiverse (again, assuming that our universe is not infinitely old), it also implies that there are an infinite number of universes in the multiverse. The existence of a multiverse is difficult enough for many theists to embrace, but even those who do, argue that the justification for such ontological extravagance is that it can help explain how the creation as a whole is the unique best possible world (i.e. the universe good making properties in all the universes, taken together, maximally outweigh the bad making properties of our universe).¹⁴ But if the multiverse is the unique, best possible world, then it appears that it cannot be infinite, since I take it that an infinite number of entities cannot be unique. So this gives us little independent reason for embracing such an extravagant ontology as an infinitely large multiverse.

2.2 Changeless time prior to creation

The second possibility is due to Swinburne (1994). He argues for the possibility that God, prior to creation, was the subject of a single, undifferentiated event—perhaps a mental act of self-awareness. According to Swinburne, during this pre-creation temporal interval there would be no metric of time. This is because a metric of time is contingent and dependent upon natural laws, inasmuch as measurement of temporal intervals requires the regularity of

¹³ Halvorson and Kragh (2011) make this point in the context of reconciling theism with a steady-state cosmology according to which the universe is infinitely old, but the point also has application in the present context.

¹⁴ See Kraay (2010).

law governed physical processes. For Swinburne, this means that the occurrence of events is sufficient for the existence, and ordering relations, of time; but for there to be a fact of the matter about the measurement of those relations, there must also exist laws of nature. Thus Swinburne argues that as long as God's pre-creation mental act of self-awareness did not involve any change throughout its duration, there would be no fact of the matter about whether the event lasted an instant or an infinite amount of time. So, we can have time before creation, without any absurdity associated with *how long* God waited to create.

How can there be time with no succession of events, and no change throughout the event in question? For Swinburne, the interval during which the act of self awareness takes place is still a temporal one, because it is possible throughout that interval that some change take place. That is to say, Swinburne endorses the *modal* reduction of time, according to which time is reduced to relations between actual *and* possible events (as opposed to relations only between actual events). I think this solution is problematic for two reasons. In the first place, I reject the modal reduction, so on my ontology there can be no time 'during' the act of self awareness.¹⁵ This means that if I wish to avail myself of Swinburne's answer, I must affirm that time did not start 'until' the first moment of creation. This view, which is as difficult to articulate as it is to believe, is the one adopted by Craig (2001). It is an odd view, and considered problematic by many. Consider, on this view, that there is no 'before' God has created, since before is a temporal relation and, on this view, God is timeless without creation. The view also renders God's temporality an accidental feature of his existence (if we assume that he need not have created).

But even if I *were* to endorse the modal reduction of time to which Swinburne subscribes, and so avoid Craig's 'timeless *sans* creation' conception of divine eternity, there

¹⁵ See Diekemper (book manuscript).

would still be a problem: I do not think that the act of self awareness by God which Swinburne considers *is* possible. To see why, we need to look at a third possible response to the concerns attending divine events before creation. This is the response that I favour.

2.3 The personhood of God

This response claims that God's essential personhood requires that his thoughts are dynamic, ordered events. According to this response, the best way to interpret the concept of the *Imago Dei* ('image of God'), in which the Bible claims human beings are made, is in terms of personhood.¹⁶ It is therefore the category of personhood that we have in common with God. Furthermore, there is good reason to believe, on this conception, that the category of personhood is essentially relational. Emil Brunner (1952) argues that the *Imago Dei* is not some intrinsic property which we have independently of our relation to God, rather, it entails a responsive relationship to God. According to Brunner, inasmuch as God reveals himself to us through Christ, Christ is the centre from which we must consider the concept of the image of God. What is this revelation? It is the revelation of 'the One who imparts Himself to me in freedom, since as Holy Love He claims me wholly for Himself' (Brunner 1952, p. 55). Furthermore, since Christ reveals himself to us in this way, his revelation of himself also provides us with a revelation of *ourselves*: 'He is the One who wills to have from me a free response to His love, a response which gives back love for love...' (*ibid.*). So as Christ reveals himself to me, I learn something about myself: I am designed to freely be in a loving relationship with him. According to Brunner, once we realize the intimate connection between knowing God through Christ and being known by him, we cannot but conclude that to be in relation to him is part of our nature.

¹⁶ Henceforth I will be assuming Christian theism.

Thus, in creating human beings in his image, God has made us to reflect his freely given love by freely responding to him in love. In being made in God's image or likeness, of course, our freedom is not just like God's; his freedom is unlimited, whereas ours is limited. Indeed, given that we are made to respond in love to God, we have a responsibility to do so, and as Brunner points out, responsibility involves a restricted freedom: it entails that we must be *free* to choose to respond (since we do not hold creatures who lack freedom responsible), but it also entails that we *must* respond appropriately in order to fulfil our responsibility. I say respond 'appropriately,' since Brunner takes it that every human being makes *some* response to the relational nature of her existence, even if she does not recognize it as such—the unbeliever responds to the call by turning away from God. So the responsibility to freely respond in love to God is part of the nature and existence of every human being. Brunner says of this responsibility that it 'is part of the unchangeable structure of man's being...he has been *made* to respond—to God' (*ibid.*, p. 57).

When this Christ centered conception of the image of God is characterized in terms of personhood, it entails that the personhood of both God and human beings is fundamentally relational and loving, and of course this is supported by the apostle John's assertion that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, my emphasis). In view of this conception of God's personhood, we have much more in common with God than the classical conception allows. The classical conception claims that God is simple, impassible, and strongly immutable; the relational conception of the image of God entails that he changes in his relations with created persons and is, to some extent, *affected* by those relations; and, of course, all of this entails that he is not simple. So on the relational conception, concerns about excessive anthropomorphism are often exaggerated and misplaced. We unacceptably anthropomorphize God only when we project our finite attributes onto him. It is the infinity of his attributes which distinguishes God from human beings, not the generic attributes themselves. So, plausibly, God and human

beings share not only love, but also such attributes as creativity, intentionality, imagination, rationality, knowledge, power, goodness, etc, but where God's capacities in realizing these attributes are unlimited, ours are limited.

Once we are freed from worries about anthropomorphism, then we are able to take at face value the depiction of God in the Bible, where such mental states as love, anger, pleasure, sorrow, regret, and jealousy are attributed to God. So we should consider what God's mental life would need to be like in order to experience these mental states.¹⁷ If God's mental life did not consist of discrete, ordered events, then all of his experiences would be accessible at every time. So, at any given time t , he might be experiencing love for a humble servant, sadness for a lost soul, anger at someone who had led believers astray, and pleasure in a particular creative plan of his (and of course, an infinite amount of other experiences). What sense can be made of the claim that any person, whether they are infinite or not, can have all of these experiences *simultaneously*? One begins to feel that what we must be dealing with here is not a person, but merely an infinite knower. We can make sense of an infinite being *knowing* everything at every time, but I would reject that any sense can be made of any being experiencing all of their intentional, emotional states at every time. And for those of us who believe in a personal God—the God of the Bible—it seems essential that we attribute such experiences to God.

If this is correct, it implies that God experiences emotions in a way that is structurally similar to ours; and this entails that God's mental life does not just consist of static, propositional attitude states, but necessarily involves the dynamic experience of events. Furthermore, as implied by the arguments of Leftow (1991), in which he posits the pleasure

¹⁷ I make no claim that, for example, God's jealousy is just like ours, since his jealousy is necessarily a righteous jealousy, and of course ours is inevitably not. So, too, for his sorrow and regret, since these will be tempered by his knowledge of his providential plan.

of anticipation experienced by God prior to creation (as an explanation of why God did not create sooner), these emotional experiences need not depend upon God's already having created. We have every reason to believe that God's inner mental life would be wonderfully rich even prior to interacting with his creation. Think of God's experiences prior to creation by analogy with an author who savours the working out of his story. God's being omniscient does not make this analogy incoherent, it just means that, unlike a human author, he does not *need* to work it out. This, however, does not entail that he does not *enjoy* working it out. And working it out requires thought processes that consist in ordered mental events.

This analogy with an author suggests another way of interpreting the doctrine of *coeternal* creation. If we agree with the advocate of coeternal creation that God is essentially creative and has always been exercising his creative power, and if we think that God's inner mental life is far richer than Swinburne's example of an undifferentiated act of self-awareness would suggest, then there is scope to claim that, prior to the creation of the universe, God's creative power was exercised in his inner mental life. Consider how much pleasure we, as persons, derive from the exercise of our creative imagination; and then consider how much more the pleasure for God must be in such an exercise. It is true, for human beings the creative process can also often be both excruciating and cathartic, and these aspects of the process would clearly not apply in God's case; but it is plausible that the pleasurable aspect of the creative process would apply in God's case. On this rendering of coeternal creation, according to which it is the exercise of his creative power in his inner mental life that is coeternal with God, there are no worries about ontological priority or infinite universes; but there are also no worries about why God waited to create, because he did not wait.

Conclusion

In Section 2 I have offered some ways of thinking about God's mental life which, if correct, entail that he is necessarily the subject of events both prior and subsequent to creation. It is God's shared personhood with ourselves that allows us to conceive of God's mental life in this way. If the essential temporality of events defended in Section 1 is also correct, then God is necessarily temporal.

References

- Bennett, J. (1988), *Events and Their Names*. Hackett Publishing: Indianapolis and Cambridge.
- Brunner, E. (1952) (transl. Olive Wyon), *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics, 2*. London: Lutterworth Press.
- Cleland, Carol E. (1991), 'On the individuation of events'. *Synthese*, 86, 229-254.
- Craig, W.L. (2001), 'Timelessness and omnitemporality', in Ganssle, G. (ed), *God and Time: Four Views*. Downers Grove: Inter-varsity Press, ch. 4.
- Diekemper, J. (2005), 'Presentism and ontological symmetry'. *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 83(2), 223-40.
- Diekemper, J. (2013), 'The existence of the past'. *Synthese*, doi: 10.1007/s11229-013-0311-3.
- Diekemper, J. (unpublished manuscript), *Events: Temporal and Eternal*.
- Ganssle, G. & Woodruff, D. (eds) (2002), *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Halvorson, H. and Kragh, H., 'Cosmology and theology', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/cosmology-theology/>
- Kim, J. (1976), 'Events as property exemplifications', in M. Brand and D. Walton (eds), *Action Theory*. Dordrecht: Reidel, pp. 159–77.
- Kraay, K. (2010), 'Theism, possible worlds, and the multiverse'. *Philosophical Studies*, 147, 355–368.
- Leftow, B. (1991), 'Why didn't God create the world sooner?'. *Religious Studies*, 27, 157-172

Leftow, B. (2002), 'The eternal present', in G. Ganssle & D. Woodruff (eds), pp. 21-48.

LePoidevin, R. (1993). 'Relationism and temporal topology: physics or metaphysics?' and 'Postscript', in R. Le Poidevin & M. MacBeath (eds), *The Philosophy of Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 149-167.

Lombard, L.: 1986, *Events in Metaphysical Study*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Lowe, J. (1998), *The Possibility of Metaphysics. Substance, Identity and Time*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Mellor, H. (1995), *The Facts of Causation*. London: Routledge.

Simons, P. (2003), 'Events', in M. Loux and D. Zimmerman (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 357-385.

Swinburne, R. (1994), *The Christian God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zimmerman, D. (2002), 'God inside time and before creation', in G. Ganssle & D. Woodruff (eds), pp. 75-94.