

Why the Incarnation Is Incompatible With An Atemporal Concept of God

Abstract

In this essay, I argue that the Incarnation of the Son of God, understood in a traditionally orthodox way, is incompatible with an atemporalist concept of God. First, I explain what I mean by atemporalism, namely the idea that God exists outside time. I also show the main corollaries of that doctrine, most notably that all of God's life occurs eternally simultaneously. Second, based on New Testament teaching and widely accepted creeds, I spell out philosophically what I mean by the Incarnation. In short, I take it to be the doctrine that the Second Person of the Trinity at some point in time took on a human body as part of a fully human nature. I then proceed to my central argument, which derives a contradiction from the definitions of the Incarnation and of atemporalism, respectively. In the last section, I shall treat some possible objections to my argument and show that they do not solve the problem satisfactorily.

Keywords: Atemporalism; Incarnation; time; eternity; Christology

I Atemporalism

Atemporalism (or the “timeless view of God”) is the view that God¹ exists outside time. The doctrine also circulates under the name “eternalism”, which I find a misleading term, because its unique feature is not to assume that God is eternal (i.e. without beginning or end) – the rival view, sempiternalism, assumes that as well – but to stipulate that God is outside time (in contrast to sempiternalism, which posits God inside time). Still, the reader should be aware that what in some of the following quotations is dubbed ‘eternal’ actually means ‘atemporally eternal’. But what does it exactly mean that God is outside time, in terms apt for a philosophical argument? One straightforward entailment is that if God does not exist in time, then *a fortiori* he does not exist *at* any point of time. This means that God does not exist *on* May 30th, 2018, like I do or my desk does. However, it certainly is true today (i.e. on May 30th, 2018) that God exists (assumed he exists at all). Hence the following working definition of atemporalism (cf. Blount 2002, 246, n.1):

(A) For every point of time *t*, while “God exists” is true at *t*, it is not the case that God exists at *t*.

Spelled out in terms of Christian Trinitarian theology, the doctrine reads

(AC) For every point of time *t*, while “God the Son exists” is true at *t*, it is not the case that God the Son exists at *t*.

This is a rather negative relationship between God and time: it just tells us that God does *not* exist at any point of time. But what then does it mean for an atemporal God to exist? Philosophers commonly use Boethius's definition as the *gold standard* for atemporal existence:

“The common opinion, according to all men living, is that God is eternal. Let us therefore consider what is eternity. For eternity will, I think, make clear to us at the same time the divine nature and knowledge.’ *Eternity is the simultaneous and complete possession of infinite life.* ... What we should rightly call eternal is that which grasps and

¹ I use the term “God” in the sense of Christian theism, according to which God is personal, eternal (without beginning or end), omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and omnibenevolent, and triune.

possesses wholly and simultaneously the fulness of unending life, which lacks naught of the future, and has lost naught of the fleeting past; and such an existence must be ever present in itself to control and aid itself, and also must keep present with itself the infinity of changing time. (Boethius 1902, Book V, 161, emphasis added)

It seems that (A) and Boethius's definition entail each other, if we allow the following *time-succession-principle* (TSP):

(TSP) A being is in time if and only if it is at least possible for its life to consist in a succession of events.

This seems straightforward. If we can have any idea of what time is, then it is that it consists in a succession of events, in other words change. Change is what is surely observable, even if no metric of time is possible. But what about a universe in which there is no event at all? Does it lack time or exist outside time? Not necessarily, in my view. If such a universe exists, and if it is not stated on other grounds that it exists outside time, it is metaphysically possible that events occur. Now consider the very first moment at which an event (= change) occurs. Has this universe somehow jumped from timelessness to time, or time come into existence instantaneously? Both ideas seem outlandish, wherefore I conclude that this universe must have been in time all along, only without change. So if no event occurs, we cannot conclude that a being is outside time, but if no event/change is even *possible*, this being must be outside time. Now according to Boethius's definition, the latter situation obtains. He states that God possesses all of his life simultaneously, at once. This means that God's life does not consist in a succession of events and therefore precludes change, which together with (TSP) entails that God is outside time. Conversely, (A) together with (TSP) entails that the life of an atemporal God cannot consist in a succession of events; therefore, if it is to be called a life at all, it must all occur simultaneously. Brian Leftow, one of the most competent spokespersons of atemporalism, supports this interpretation of Boethius's view (Leftow 1998):

"...according to Boethius, if anything is a life and is temporally extended, it is not lived all at once. Boethius states that an eternal life is lived all at once. (...) eternal life does not divide into earlier and later parts." (190)

"Part of what distinguishes eternity from time, to Boethius, is that eternity lacks earlier and later 'parts'. If this is so, eternal entities or events cannot be earlier or later than one another; *all eternal entities or events must exist or occur simultaneously.*" (p. 207, emphasis added)

To see this more concretely, consider the following propositions which follow from (AC) (which is equivalent to (A)):

- i) on the day Charlemagne was crowned emperor, "God the Son exists" is true
- ii) on the day JFK was shot, "God the Son exists" is true
- iii) on Oct 26, 2017, "God the Son exists" is true

and so forth. It is, however not true, that God the Son *exists at* (i) through (iii). In other words, given (AC), we cannot identify any *temporal distinction* between the "God the Son exists" propositions in (i) through (iii). "God the Son exists" remains equal in all three propositions, but the only possibility of temporal distinction – the date given in the first part of the sentences – is disconnected from the latter part due to (AC). This means that with respect to time, the propositions i), ii) and iii) are equal. Now, if some events are equal with respect to time, we call them 'simultaneous'. Therefore, given (AC), *God the Son's existence is simultaneous with all three events.* And if God is to be able to observe what is happening in temporal history, we are obliged to say that *all three events are simultaneous for God* (the Son).

One might complain here about the use of the temporal term ‘simultaneous’ in an atemporal context. True, if we wish to clearly distinguish atemporal existence from temporal existence, we should seek to use univocal terms for each. I fail to find a word in English which describes the relation between parts of an atemporal existence (if there are any) properly; the best I can do is offer the term ‘eternally simultaneous’. I will use that term in what follows.

We have hitherto established that divine atemporalism entails that God’s life does not consist in a succession of events, but rather that all parts (if there are any) or aspects of his life are eternally simultaneous with each other. From this seems to follow that the atemporal God is immutable; in fact, I have already used ‘event’ and ‘change’ interchangeably, suggesting that a lack of (succession of) events entails a lack of change. Conversely, from the immutability of a being follows (via TSP) that it is timeless. And indeed, the mutual entailment of immutability and atemporality is widely accepted among philosophers throughout the history of Christian philosophy:

In you it is not one thing to be and another to live: the supreme degree of being and the supreme degree of life are one and the same thing. You are being in a supreme degree and are immutable. In you the present day has no ending... (Augustine, Confessions, I. vi (10))

I answer that, *the idea of eternity follows immutability*, as the idea of time follows movement, as appears from the preceding article. Hence, as God is supremely immutable, it supremely belongs to Him to be eternal. (Aquinas, Sum.Theol. I, Qu.10, Art. 2 Reply; emphasis added)

[T]imelessness can be regarded as that property or mode of possessing properties which is such that it will ensure that property of immutability that is necessary for explicating the creator-creature distinction as this is understood in Christian theology. (Helm 1997, 20)

In what follows, I accept that timelessness entails immutability and vice versa. For a more thorough defense of this connection, see Helm (1997) and Leftow (1998).

II The Incarnation

By the *Incarnation* I mean the Christian doctrine that at a certain point of time in our succession of events (=history) the Second Person of the Trinity took on a fully human nature. The biblical *locus classicus* for this doctrine is John 1:14²:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

It seems clear from this verse that God the Son took on a human *body* as part of his assumption of a human nature (“became flesh”, “dwelt among us”). Actually, the *embodiment* of God the Son seems to be the apostle John’s emphasis rather than the abstract notion of human nature:

That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we *looked upon* and have *touched* with our hands, concerning the word of life... (1 John 1:1, emphasis added)

Although I do believe that God the Son took on a fully human nature (which encompasses more than just a human body), I shall focus on his embodiment in what follows. The reason is simple and in line with the apostle John’s argumentation: a human body can be seen, heard, and touched, whereas a human nature as an abstract thing cannot. Therefore, Christ’s human body

² All Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV.

makes a much more straightforward premise (i.e. less subject to interpretation) than his human nature.

Let me now make clear a few things I assume about Christ's human body.

First of all, I assume that it was not different from our bodies. The only difference lies in its genesis: according to the New Testament, it did not come about by fertilization, but by a divine intervention³. Apart from that, I take it that its genesis followed the usual procedure of embryogenesis. This means in particular that Christ's body started as a (presumably diploid) egg cell and developed into a baby within roughly nine months. Thus, Christ's body had all the properties of an average male body. It felt hunger⁴, was tired at times⁵, and could bleed⁶, among others.

Second, I assume that Christ retained his body after his resurrection. I take this to be New Testament teaching. Consider the following passage from Acts:

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11, ESV)

The crucial point is that the two men in white robes (apparently angels) state that Christ "will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." That presumably includes him coming back in a cloud, but also coming back embodied. But from this follows that in the meantime – the time between ascension and return – Christ retains his human body. Other NT verses seem to support this view⁷. I also see no way to impugn this straightforward conclusion. Does it make a difference that Christ presumably received a new body at the resurrection? I cannot see that it does. First of all, there seems to be uninterrupted continuity between the incarnation body and the resurrection body. It is not entirely clear (at least to me) in which relation the two stand, but according to the Gospels, the tomb was empty, suggesting that the old body was somehow absorbed into the new. Thus there seems to have been no point of time during Christ's earthly sojourn at which a body of him did not exist. Second, the resurrection body is a human body, despite some astonishing properties (e.g. being able to pass through walls⁸). On the one hand, the disciples perceived the risen Christ as a human (Mary even mistook him for the gardener⁹), on the other hand the believers in him are promised a similar resurrection body¹⁰.

Third, I believe that Christ's human body was simultaneously the body of God the Son. This follows from the assumption that the incarnated Christ consists of *only one person*, as expressed for example by the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D., emphasis added):

We confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ... the same perfect in Godhead, the same in perfect manhood, *truly God and truly man* ... acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation—the difference of natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved, and *combining into one person and hypostasis—not divided or separated into two persons*, but one and the same Son and only begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.

The Council not only stated that Jesus Christ is *truly God and truly man*, but also that those two natures are combined *into one person, not two persons*. Of course, to be truly man, one has to have a

³ Luke 1:35

⁴ Matthew 4:2

⁵ Mark 4:38

⁶ John 19:34

⁷ e.g. Acts 7:55; Hebrews 4:14-15; Revelation 19:11-13

⁸ John 20:19

⁹ John 20:15

¹⁰ e.g. Col 1:18; 1 Cor 15

body (which is too trivial to be stated explicitly in the creed). If the human and divine nature are combined in one person, and that person is truly human, that person (call it ‘the Redeemer’¹¹) has a body, which then is also the body of the divine nature, i.e. God the Son.

At this point, one might question the legitimacy of this assumption. After all, the Creed of Chalcedon is a matter of debate. Thomas Morris, for example, calls the Chalcedon doctrine “impossible, self-contradictory, incoherent, absurd, and even unintelligible” (Morris 1986, 18) because it states that two distinct natures dwell in one and the same person. This, of course, is a general challenge for all who wish to stick to an orthodox Christology which preserves that Christ is “truly God and truly man”. For my argument, however, it does not matter how one relieves the tension inherent in the Chalcedon doctrine, and not even whether one attempts to relieve it at all. I will briefly show why.

In principle, there are two possibilities for mending the alleged incoherence of the Chalcedon doctrine: one might posit two distinct persons (one divine and one human) or one might establish a theory which explains how a human and a divine nature can co-exist in something that at least looks like one person. Morris himself tried the latter way by offering his well-known “two-minds view” (Morris 1986) according to which the person of Jesus Christ consists of a divine and a human mind (the human mind having limited access to the divine mind while the divine mind has unlimited access to the human mind). The former option would lead to something like the heresy of Nestorianism, according to which there are indeed two distinct persons in the incarnate Christ. Whichever of the two options one prefers, both of them entail that the body of Jesus Christ is the body of God the Son. After all, that is what results if one wishes to stick to a reasonable interpretation of the term “incarnation”.

Fourth, because of the foregoing I assume that whatever the Redeemer went through, it directly afflicted God the Son (which of course follows from the above assumption that both are one and the same person). For example, when Jesus prayed “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”¹² it was obviously God the Son praying (“Father”); therefore, the fear of the imminent suffering also afflicted God the Son, not just the man Jesus Christ. Or, consider Christ exclaiming “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”¹³. Again, it seems to be God the Son speaking, and upon this statement, Jesus – the human being – died, apparently because God the Son had yielded his spirit to the Father¹⁴. From this I glean that we cannot reasonably distinguish between things God the Son went through and things the man Jesus Christ went through. They seem to be identical.

III

The Incarnation of An Atemporal God Seems Logically Impossible

From sections I and II, one thing should already dawn on the reader’s mind, namely that the Incarnation requires God to experience an event and hence change and is therefore at odds with atemporalism which precludes any change in God whatsoever. The presumed change in God is a change from state 1 (God the Son exists without a human body before the Incarnation) to state 2 (God the Son exists with a human body after the Incarnation).

My argument makes this tension explicit. Taxonomically, it is a *reductio ad absurdum* of atemporalism as expressed in (AC). Let t_0 be the point of time¹⁵ of Mary’s conception, t_z the point of time of Christ’s ascension and $t_1 > t_0$:

¹¹ I owe this terminology to (Senor 2002).

¹² Mt 26:39

¹³ Lk 23:46

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Following Richard Swinburne (1993), I deliberately use the somewhat bulky term „point of time“ instead of „instant“ here. Swinburne points out that nothing can happen in an instant (construed as an infinitesimally small amount of time).

- 1) The body of Jesus Christ = the body of God the Son.
- 2) For all $t_x < t_0$, the body of Jesus Christ does not exist.
- 3) For all $t_x < t_0$, “God the Son exists in timeless eternity” is true.
- 4) Therefore, for all $t_x < t_0$, “God the Son exists in timeless eternity without the body of Jesus Christ” is true. (from 1, 2, 3)
- 5) For points of time $t_1 \dots t_Y > t_Z$, the body of Jesus Christ exists.
- 6) For all points of time $t_1 \dots t_Y > t_Z$, “God the Son exists in timeless eternity” is true.
- 7) Therefore, for points of time $t_1 \dots t_Y > t_Z$, “God the Son exists in timeless eternity with the body of Jesus Christ” is true. (from 1, 5, 6)
- 8) For all points of time $t_x \dots t_0 \dots t_Y$, “God the Son exists in timeless eternity” is (eternally) simultaneously true. (from (AC) and 3, 6)
- 9) Hence, “God the Son exists in timeless eternity without the body of Jesus Christ” and “God the Son exists in timeless eternity with the body of Jesus Christ” are (eternally) simultaneously true. (from 4, 7, 8)
- 10) IX is a contradiction.
- 11) Therefore, (AC) is false. (from 10)

Premise 1 seems straightforwardly true on all readings (even heterodox ones) of the Incarnation (see section II).

Premise 2 seems to be obvious. In particular, it follows from the assumption made explicit in section II that the body of Jesus Christ is a normal human body (with the exception of its supernatural genesis). Premises 3 and 6 are direct entailments from (AC); 4 and 7 follow validly from 1, 2 and 3.

Premise 5 needs a bit of explication. After all, it says not only that the body of Christ existed during his earthly sojourn (which includes $t_1 \dots t_Z$), but that it continues to exist after his ascension. In particular, it derives from the definition of the Incarnation given in section II. If the body of Jesus Christ was, biologically speaking, a normal human body, it follows that it arose from a zygote located in Mary’s womb. Where do we temporally locate the formation of that zygote? The most natural idea would be to locate it at the point of time when the angel spoke to Mary¹⁶ or shortly after. But even if one claimed that the zygote was in Mary’s womb all along since she existed (egg cells are formed quite early during embryogenesis), it cannot have existed before Mary herself was conceived.

Premise 8, finally, is a direct entailment of (AC) as explicated in section I. If it is proper to call all instances of atemporal divine life ‘eternally simultaneous’, then 8) is what follows from (AC) and premises 3 and 6. Note that 8) does not say or entail that *points of time t_x to t_Y are simultaneous*. This is the worry expressed by Kenny and Swinburne:

...on St. Thomas’ [*atemporalist, see section I*] view, my typing of this paper is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Again, on his view, the great fire of Rome is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Therefore, while I type these very words, Nero fiddles heartlessly on. (Kenny 1979, 38-9, brackets added)

God’s timelessness is said to consist in his existing at all moments of human time—simultaneously. Thus he is said to be simultaneously present at (and a witness of) what I did yesterday, what I am doing today, and what I will do tomorrow. But if t_1 is simultaneous with t_2 and t_2 with t_3 , then t_1 is simultaneous with t_3 . So if the instant at which God knows these things were simultaneous with both yesterday, today and tomorrow, then these days would be simultaneous with each other. So yesterday would be the same day as today and as tomorrow— which is clearly nonsense. (Swinburne 1977, 220-1)

¹⁶ Luke 1:26-38

From the temporal perspective, t_x to t_y are distinct and consecutive, not simultaneous with each other (see also the non-transitivity criterion in Stump and Kretzmann 1981, 430). Only from God's atemporal perspective are those points of time simultaneous. Premise 9 follows validly from 4), 7) and 8), and, as it is a contradiction, it renders (AC) false.

IV Objections And Replies

1. The "Neo-Nestorian" interpretation of the Incarnation

A defender of atemporalism might reply that premise 9 is only a contradiction because premises 4 and 7 suggest the reading "God the Son *has/does not have as an intrinsic*¹⁷ property the body of Jesus Christ." However, he might claim, they should be reformulated as "God the Son exists & Jesus Christ's body exists/does not exist". If restated in that way, no contradiction remains. To see this, consider first the former reading of 4 and 7:

- 4) For all $t_x < t_0$, "God the Son exists in timeless eternity and does not have the body of Jesus Christ as an intrinsic property" is true.
- 7) For points of time $t_1 \dots t_y > t_z$, "God the Son exists in timeless eternity and does not have the body of Jesus Christ as an intrinsic property" is true.

which together result in

- 9) "It is not the case that God the Son exists in timeless eternity and has as an intrinsic property the body of Jesus Christ" and "It is the case that God the Son exists in timeless eternity and has as an intrinsic property the body of Jesus Christ" are eternally simultaneously true.

which clearly is a contradiction.

But, the atemporalist might hold, we should just modify premises 4 and 7 as follows:

- 4*) For all $t_x < t_0$, "God the Son exists in timeless eternity" & "The body of Jesus Christ does not exist" is true.
- 7*) For points of time $t_1 \dots t_y > t_z$, "God the Son exists in timeless eternity" & "The body of Jesus Christ exists" are true.

which together entail

- 9*) ("God the Son exists in timeless eternity" & "The body of Jesus Christ does not exist") and ("God the Son exists in timeless eternity" & "The body of Jesus Christ exists") are (eternally) simultaneously true.

which seems to be perfectly acceptable, given (AC).

I will show now that this move comes at a high cost, in fact on pain of a heresy that resembles Nestorianism, but takes it even further. I dub the resulting view "Neo-Nestorianism".

¹⁷ Intrinsic properties are non-relational properties. For example, the mass of a stone is an intrinsic property, because it does not depend on any relation to other things. The stone's weight, however, is an *extrinsic* property, because it depends on the gravitational field in which it is located.

- (i) First of all, 9*) describes how an atemporal Son of God can coexist with the body of Jesus Christ by denying the body to be an intrinsic property of God the Son. To be sure, it is clear that embodiment is no *essential* property of God the Son, but should always be considered an *accidental* property of him. Can it be held, however, that the human body is no intrinsic property of God the Son, but just an *extrinsic* one? This would presumably amount to regarding it like, for example, the creation of animals. Surely *something* changed in God's relation to creation when he brought about the animals. But with that no atemporalist (who is also committed to divine immutability) feels uncomfortable with, because the change affects just an extrinsic property. So can the body of Jesus Christ be regarded on a par with, say, the creation of animals?

As I pointed out in section II, there seems to be a very close connection between God the Son and the human body of Jesus Christ, a connection that smacks much more of an intrinsic than an extrinsic property. But let's make it explicit what considering Jesus Christ's body as an extrinsic property would amount to. One could regard the bringing-about of Christ's body as a temporal act of an eternal God (cf. Wolterstorff 1975, p. 88-91), just like the creation of the animals or the parting of the Red Sea. Of course, one wants to preserve some connection between the body of Jesus Christ and God the Son; it might be claimed that God was present in Jesus Christ in a way unprecedented among humans, yet deny that Christ's body was really God the Son's. To me, it is totally mysterious how God the Son can himself experience fear, pain and death through such a remotely connected body. Worse still, it is not just mysterious, but looks like outright heresy. The Neo-Nestorian picture entails that Jesus Christ is to be regarded as a human person in time, while another divine person distinct from him somehow 'steers' him from timeless eternity. We have thus two persons, which are not even 'located' in the same body, but totally distinct even with respect to their relation to time. This seems to be an absurd distortion of New Testament teaching.

- (ii) Neo-Nestorianism requires Christ's human nature to be eternal. Even if we grant that Neo-Nestorianism can explain how the coming-into-existence of Christ's body does not bring about a change in God, it still has to explain the 'taking on' of his human nature in such a way that it means no change in God (assuming that the human body is a necessary, though not sufficient part of the Incarnation). The easiest way is to claim that God the Son has a human nature *eternally* (yet accidentally, not essentially). This is the position of Douglas Blount. He writes:

I should think, however, that the traditional language about the Son's assuming a nature is *intended not to make a claim about what is true at two different times t and t^** (namely, that at t the Son lacked a human nature but at t^* the Son possessed such a nature). Rather, such language is intended to *emphasize the fact that*, while the Son possesses a human nature, *such a nature is accidental to him* (and, perhaps, that he has it voluntarily). (Blount 2002, 243, emphasis added)

To me, it is quite a theological stretch to attribute to Christ an eternal human nature. The overall language of the New Testament seems to suggest that the Son took on a human nature together with the Incarnation¹⁸, not that he had this nature eternally. While it seems clear that the human nature is indeed non-essential to God the Son, *pace* Blount, the presented interpretation is a very unnatural reading of Scripture.

But perhaps Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann can come to Blount's aid here. They, too, seem to assume the eternity of Christ's human nature. With respect to the Incarnation, they write that at some point in time, the "human nature of the second person has been temporally actual." (Stump and Kretzmann 1981, p. 453). It remains unclear, however, what they mean by "temporally actual". Do they mean that the eternally divine-human Christ appeared to people in a human shape, like the theophanies in the Old Testament? This is surely much too weak to capture the thrust of the Incarnation, which is that Christ became *truly human*. Or do they mean that God just creates a human being named Jesus Christ, which is then controlled by God the

¹⁸ e.g. Phil 2:5-7, Hebr 2:17

Son? This brings us right back to Neo-Nestorianism. They might of course mean that the eternal human nature took on temporal properties via its embodiment. But this surely constitutes an intrinsic change and thus jeopardizes the whole immutability/atemporality theory. All in all, it seems that the atemporalist must either bite the bullet of Neo-Nestorianism or give up his theory.

2. Quasi-Temporal Eternality

But perhaps not. A second approach to reconciling atemporalism with the Incarnation could be to deny that 9) is a contradiction for an atemporal God. One way to attempt this is to adduce Brian Leftow's notion of Quasi-Temporal Eternality (QTE, see Leftow 1991, 120–2). Leftow holds that God's life, understood as an atemporal duration, involves distinct points, but no parts. These points are in some sense earlier and later than one another, but they do not stand in the relation of succession. He calls this view 'quasi-temporal'. To make this seemingly paradoxical idea plausible, Leftow appeals to the B-theory of time, which builds on McTaggart's distinction between A-series and B-series of time (McTaggart 1908). According to the B-theory, (i) all times and events exist and are equally real and (ii) there is a complete tenseless description of temporal reality. Leftow's idea is that "Boethian eternity is like an extension in B-time, and that a QTE being's life contains earlier and later points with no succession between them. In this respect, we are told, it is like life in B-time, only without an illusion of temporal passage." (Deng 2018, sect. 4.1)

How can this help? On such a B-theoretical view, timeless eternity can have 'quasi-temporal' features, e.g. 'earlier' and 'later' (yet no succession). Perhaps God the Son's state before the Incarnation might be construed as 'earlier' and his state after the Incarnation as 'later', without claiming that both states constitute a succession of events in God's life. If this were possible, 9) would not be a contradiction, but would just represent two aspects of God's atemporal life. Maybe. Three things need to be said here. First, while the B-theory doesn't posit temporal passage, it does posit succession. It seems therefore that Leftow is introducing a misinterpretation of the B-theory. Secondly, it seems that if a QTE-God's life is to be somehow related to temporal history, time itself must be a B-series, which is subject to much debate (for example, W.L. Craig (2001) rejects B-theory as false). Finally, it is still not clear (at least to me) how an eternal atemporal life can incorporate seemingly contradictory states of affairs. The problem here is *not with divine interactions in history* (I think the atemporalist can accommodate those), but with presumed *changes in God himself*. To see this, let us replace the Incarnation in the above argument with the parting of the Red Sea (t_0 - t_1 = the period of time in which the parting occurs):

- 1) For all $t_x < t_0$, God does not bring about the parting of the Red Sea.
- 2) For all $t_x < t_0$, "God exists in timeless eternity" is true.
- 3) Therefore, for all $t_x < t_0$, "God exists in timeless eternity" and "God does not bring about the parting of the Red Sea" is true. (from 1, 2)
- 4) For points of time t_0 - t_1 , God brings about the parting of the Red Sea.
- 5) For all points of time t_0 - t_1 , "God exists in timeless eternity" is true.
- 6) Therefore, for points of time t_0 - t_1 , "God exists in timeless eternity" and "God brings about the parting of the Red Sea" is true. (from 1, 4, 5)
- 7) For all points of time t_x ... t_0 ... t_1 , "God exists in timeless eternity" is (eternally) simultaneously true. (from (AC) and 2, 5)
- 8) Hence, "God exists in timeless eternity and God does not bring about the parting of the Red Sea" and "God exists in timeless eternity and God brings about the parting of the Red Sea" are (eternally) simultaneously true. (from 3, 6, 7)

The conclusion 8) is no contradiction, because in the atemporalist picture, all of God's interventions in history may be seen as aspects of one integrated atemporal act of will (cf. Wolterstorff 1975). Why then does the argument generate a contradiction when it comes to the

Incarnation? It is because the Incarnation seems to affect God himself. To construe mutually exclusive states with respect to God himself as part of God's eternal, atemporal act of will would be to suppose that God wills contradictory and hence irrational things, which in turn clashes with his perfect rationality.

If we can distill one thing from all that has been said, it is this: atemporalism time and again runs into problems because of its doctrinal sibling, divine immutability. It seems that the atemporalist, in order to avoid heresy, needs to show that the Incarnation can be understood in a way suggested by the New Testament and yet not entail an intrinsic change in God himself, for example by plausibly reconstructing atemporal existence in a B-series manner. As long as this has not been done, I take it that my argument suggests that we should construe God as temporal rather than atemporal.

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