

Book reviews

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William Lane Craig *God, Time and Eternity. The Coherence of Theism II: Eternity.* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). Pp. xi + 321. £74.00 (Hbk). ISBN 1402000111.

The years since the publication of Nelson Pike's *God and Timelessness* (1970) have seen a very considerable number of books and articles in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition on the issue of God's relation to time, easily divisible without borderline cases into supporters and opponents of the view that God is outside time. Craig has the unusual view that God is timeless 'when' there is no universe, but exists in time since the universe came into existence. Yet, although this is his view, most of the book is devoted to establishing the latter claim – as long as there is time (which according to Craig is as long as there is a universe), God exists at every moment of that time – He is everlasting. Craig's Part I covers well-worn ground. He acknowledges that there is one good philosophical argument for God being timeless – that God would be more perfect if He possessed His life all at once, and Craig claims that it is coherent to suppose that there might be a timeless person, so long as he does not cause or know about a changing universe. But the universe could not be dependent on God as it exists, nor could He know about it as it changes, without God Himself changing and so being temporal – so long as the tensed theory of time is true (that is so long as there are truths about what is past, present, or future, additional to truths about what happens at particular named dates – e.g. 2003). If the tenseless theory of time were true, then the four-dimensional universe would exist as a whole, and could be dependent for its existence throughout all time on God who was timelessly aware of it. At this point Craig refers us to two books of his in which in which he has argued at length that the tensed theory is true [to be reviewed in the next issue of *Religious Studies* – Ed.]; and he gives here a two-page summary of his arguments in these books.

He then goes on in part 2, section 1 to consider how God is related to the time measured by human clocks. He accepts Newton's view that there is a true 'metaphysical time' – there are truths about the length of all intervals between events, whether or not they are measured correctly by human clocks. Einstein gave no good reason for denying this, only for denying that we could know about it –

because we would need to know which is the preferred frame of reference in which intervals should be measured by the Einstein method, and there seemed no way in which this could be discovered. However, modern cosmological theory has discovered a preferred frame of reference, the frame of the 'fundamental particles', in effect clusters of galaxies, of the expanding universe itself, and so we have a cosmic time, which is – Craig claims – a rough measure of metaphysical time. The universe had a beginning – Craig regards this claim as essential to the 'biblical' doctrine of creation, and plausibly he claims that there is today good evidence from physics that it did. Hence, he claims in Part II, section 2, time began when the universe did. But that would seem to imply that God existed only as long as the universe did. Not so, claims Craig, (though with some hesitation) – there is also a timeless phase of God's existence, causally but not temporally 'before' the beginning of the universe.

Craig argues clearly and rigorously, has read and understood thoroughly an enormous amount of literature, and deals with his opponents very fairly. He devotes a very large number of pages to detailed cogent criticisms of traditional accounts of timelessness (involving God's 'co-occurrence' with events in time) – especially the views of Leftow, and Stump and Kretzmann. He might perhaps have produced a book of more immediate use to many readers if he had condensed some of this material and also perhaps some of the lengthy historical discussion of Newton's views; and provided instead a short defence of the tensed theory of time (which in any case he should have explained in a simpler way at an earlier stage of the book). Then we would have had a more self-contained book with a less provisional conclusion. However, Craig wants a thoroughly justified and integrated world-view; and who am I to quarrel with that ambition? This book is the second volume of an ongoing 'philosophical analysis' of the principal attributes of God (ix), a sequel to his *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (1990).

I find myself in agreement with almost all of the first three-quarters of the present book, which forms a thorough and cogent treatment of the issues. But I do not find myself in agreement with part 2, section 2. Craig needs to consider what it means to say that the universe has a beginning (and here I may refer him to one of the very few relevant articles to which he does not refer in the book – my 'The beginning of the universe and of time', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 26 (1996), 169–189). To say that something began to exist may mean either that there was a time before it existed, or that it has existed only for a finite period of time – that is a finite number of intervals (= periods) of equal length, for example years. For mundane objects and events these two criteria coincide. But in the case of the universe as a whole, they can only coincide when periods of time can correctly be called either finite or infinite. That requires there to be truths about time, not merely that one event happened before another but that it happened at exactly such and such a length of time before the other. It seems to me that, in the absence of an orderly universe and so laws of nature making possible a system of

coincident clocks, there would be no truth about how long intervals lasted, and so no distinction between finite and infinite periods. So if, around the time of the Big Bang, the universe was not governed by laws of nature, the only sense in which the universe could have had a beginning is if there was empty time before it. And if there is a univocal sense in the claim that the universe had a beginning whether or not it was always law-governed (as it seems to me clear that there is), then the only possible understanding of the beginning must be in terms of an empty time preceding it. The beginning of the universe entails the existence of empty time preceding it, and since the only sense which could be given to that time having a beginning would be in terms of empty time preceding that beginning, time could not have a beginning. Yet, if time (though not a metric time) existed before the universe, God must have existed in it. So we are spared Craig's view that God existed timelessly 'before' time (and we are also spared the view that God existed for an infinite number of years before Creation).

Now Craig, as I wrote, believes that there are truths about the lengths of all temporal intervals, logically independent of any measurements provided by human clocks. This seems to me implausible, because it has the consequence that all clocks and all physical processes might suddenly slow down a trillion times, so that while the first tick of some pendulum lasted only a second, the second tick lasted a trillion seconds. Yet it seems to me that our grasp of the concept of a temporal interval depends on having certain paradigm cases of intervals that are approximately equal to each other.

If, however, Craig is right about this, then he has a possibly univocal sense to the universe having had a beginning – it existed only for a finite number of years; and my present argument for time necessarily existing before the beginning of the universe fails. Even so, I must add, and even if there is a 'biblical doctrine' that 'God brought the universe into being ... at some moment', there is no reason to suppose that the biblical writers were committed to the doctrine that this occurred 'in the finite past' (255), that is, a finite number of temporal intervals of equal length ago. That kind of mathematical sophistication never entered their minds.

The only reason Craig gives for not going along with the view of Padgett and myself that if the universe had a beginning, God existed before it in an unmetrizable time, derives from his commitment to the impossibility of 'a succession of an actually infinite number of progressively longer intervals' (269), terminating in the present – the view that this is impossible being one for which he has argued at length elsewhere and which forms the basis of *kalam* arguments for the existence of God. For, he claims correctly, any period of time (even if unmetrizable) before creation would consist of a nested series of an infinite number of smaller and smaller periods within it. But what counts as an 'actual infinite'? If God throughout such a period is changeless, the actuality of the infinity of this series can consist only in the possibility of the period of time being cut up into boundaries separating intervals in this way. But if that is enough for the 'actuality' of an infinite, it seems

manifestly false that there cannot be such a series – the past hour consists of one half-hour, one quarter-hour, one-eighth-hour ... ad infinitum, the later members lying within the earlier members.

Craig claims that God in His existence causally 'prior' to a changing universe would be (accidentally) unchanging and so (accidentally) timeless. But is it supposed to be a necessary truth that there couldn't be a being (causally prior to a changing universe) in time and unchanging? This seems implausible – surely there is sense to saying that something goes on existing without changing, although it could change. Craig denies that the mere possibility of something changing is enough to make it temporal, on the grounds that thereby 'we rule out the possibility of a beginning ... of time by definition' (274). Not by definition exactly, but as a matter of logical necessity, and for the reasons I gave above, I think we are right to do so. But if the mere possibility isn't enough to make it temporal, what is? What is the difference between God (causally prior to the universe) being timeless and unchanging, and being temporal and unchanging? I cannot see that Craig has given any content to this difference; and since (barring a misguided appeal to the impossibility of an actual infinite) the latter supposition is coherent, I see no reason to suppose that the former forms a coherent alternative to it.

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Tommi Lehtonen and Timo Koistinen (eds.) *Perspectives in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*. (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2000). Pp. 255. Pbk. ISBN 951 9047 53 0.

This book is a collection of twelve articles based on papers given at the University of Helsinki in 1998. The subject of the conference, and the question posed by the editors, is: what is philosophy of religion and what should it be? Some authors address this question by looking at recent work on the subject (Peter Byrne, Nicholas Wolterstorff), others are concerned with the nature of philosophy of religion itself and its relationship with other philosophical and theological fields (Ingolf Dalferth, Eberhard Herrmann); most, however, take up the question rather obliquely.

The opening essay by Peter Byrne provides an interesting discussion of the apparent decline of philosophy of religion in the UK. He contrasts this with the robust state of the subject in the US, and surveys recent work by John Hick, Richard Swinburne, and D. Z. Phillips. Byrne diagnoses the current slump in the field as the result of a growth in secularism in British intellectual life, with a consequent

lack of impetus for academic research; whereas the status of Christian belief in the US is very much a live issue, and even for atheists there is 'something still felt worth rebutting'. I am not entirely convinced by Byrne's diagnosis of the condition of British philosophy of religion. While it is true that there are circumstances under which wider cultural interest in an area could stimulate philosophical endeavour, it does not seem that it could reliably do so, or that such interest is in any case necessary. For example, the ebb and flow of research activity in, say, ethics or political philosophy does not seem to mirror more general interest in these areas. Moreover, many of the problems of the central fields of philosophy are little understood outside a narrow academic field. There is no clear corollary to Byrne's proposal for aesthetics or philosophy of language. An alternative possibility is that, following the decline of research activity in British philosophy of religion in the 1960s, the subject is in a recession from which it is difficult to emerge for a variety of reasons. There are few lecturers in philosophy of religion who also research or would be prepared to supervise graduate students in the area, there are few job openings, and there is continued progress and growth in other fields (such as philosophy of mind) which are a magnet for upcoming philosophers.

Wolterstorff assesses analytic philosophy of religion over the last twenty-five years. He proposes that most researchers are metaphysical realists about God, theologically conservative, epistemologically confident about our access to God and the warrantedness of religious belief, and who pursue the subject from individual religious conviction. He then characterizes the development of the subject as consisting in the emergence of Reformed Epistemology from the Enlightenment project, especially the work of Locke and Kant, and concludes with some proposals about future development. Wolterstorff does briefly mention Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians, though since this view fails to satisfy any of suggested characteristics of analytic philosophy of religion, it is not clear whether he would regard it (along with other non-realist positions) as outside the analytic tradition, or whether he believes that it was a spent force by 1973.

A paper which certainly falls into the category of 'oblique approach' is Eleonore Stump's 'Second-person accounts and the problem of evil'. Stump takes an argument from the philosophy of mind to develop a distinction between first-person and third-person experiences, points of view, and descriptions of these experiences. First-person experiences are our experiences of our own mental events; we seem to have a special awareness of our own minds and can also give an account of this in rich phenomenal language. This contrasts with the third-person point of view of a scientific investigation which can be expressed in an 'expository' language. Stump then introduces a 'second-person' experience/point of view/account which requires the conscious interaction with another person. She proceeds to reinterpret God's speeches in the book of Job in terms of a second-person account between God and His creatures which lets us participate 'in the perception of God's relation' to the world. Moreover Job himself

has a second-person experience of God. According to Stump, a second-person account/experience may provide an effective response to evil, and to Job's doubts about God's trustworthiness, even if it falls short of the kind of third-person explanation typically sought by theodocists.

While the application of the second-person is interesting, I was doubtful that the distinction is sustainable. Stump's proposal takes its cue from an argument due to Frank Jackson concerning a subject, Mary, fully informed of all the scientific facts about colour – its physical characteristics, its neurological effects, etc. – but who has never actually seen any colours. Jackson's contention is that once Mary sees a colour, she would have new knowledge, i.e. knowledge of certain phenomenal qualities. If correct, it follows that there are some phenomenal characteristics of 'first-person' experiences which are not captured by scientific descriptions. But how does this lead to a distinction between first, second and third persons? We might suppose that Mary, rather than being deprived of colour experiences is isolated from other people. Clearly, upon coming into contact with people, Mary would gain new knowledge about human relationships and what other people are like. But it seems that we could account for what she comes to know in terms of the first and third person categories. Mary may learn new facts about other humans and human interactions, which are presumably third-person. Mary may also discover *what it is like* to interact with other people, for instance, what it is like to be loved. There is, of course, a huge difference in both 'factual' and phenomenal terms between a lack of colour experiences and a lack of company, but it is not clear why one should need to posit a new category of second-person experience to account for this.

Mikael Stenmark examines some recent approaches by 'theological pragmatists' (notably Sally McFague, but also Gordon Kaufman, Mary Daly, and Rosemary Ruether) to religious epistemology and rationality, with the aim of facilitating better communication between philosophers of religion and theologians on the subject. He finds that these theologians are guided principally by ethical and political concerns in their evaluation of religious belief and rationality. Indeed, McFague encourages us to turn away from the question of the truth of religious beliefs to consider instead the kinds of attitudes they engender and whether they are helpful or harmful. However, Stenmark points out that this theological approach is not committed to a pragmatic conception of truth (with its associated philosophical difficulties) if the pragmatic considerations are applied to only a restricted range of beliefs. Specifically, those beliefs or assertions which are purely expressive, metaphorical, or whose truth value cannot be determined. This yields the somewhat less controversial view that pragmatic criteria should guide us in the assessment of beliefs which cannot be settled factually.

As Wolterstorff indicated, most philosophers of religion are metaphysical realists about God. But on Stenmark's proposal, theological pragmatism leaves alone those statements which we can know to be true, consequently it is consistent with

and could potentially engage with (at least some types of) philosophy of religion. Unfortunately, this interpretation of theological pragmatism is hard to square with what Stenmark's selected theologians claim: McFague, for instance, asserts that *all* statements are metaphorical. As Stenmark points out, this puts us into the unhappy situation of having to evaluate even scientific claims by pragmatic criteria, and we could imagine on this basis rejecting a claim such as 'it is possible to split the atom' because of its undesirable consequences. Stenmark believes that this presents the theological pragmatist with a choice: (1) a radical non-realism, with a consequent loss of any distinction between metaphorical and literal statements or criteria (because there are no literal statements of criteria); (2) the more modest application of pragmatic consideration on the lines that he suggests. However, it was not clear to me that the theologians he discusses would not be prepared to take for the first 'nuclear' option. Alternatively, they could adopt a thoroughly non-realist approach to religious discourse and allow for realism in other areas; most ethical expressivists, for example, are realists about (some parts of) scientific discourse. If so, it is difficult to see a constructive dialogue emerging between theological pragmatists and philosophers of religion, as it currently stands.

The book reflects the strong panel of contributors at the Helsinki conference; the papers, as one would expect, a generally of high standard (John Clayton's interesting essay on religious diversity also deserves mention). It may not reach a consensus on the nature or direction of philosophy of religion, but it certainly deserves a read.

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