

GOD, TIME AND CREATION:  
AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE CRAIG/PADGETT DEBATE

**Introduction**

Is there a state in which God exists alone without creation?<sup>1</sup> And if so, how are we to conceive of God's relationship to time in such a state? Put very simply, is God timeless or in some sense temporal without creation? According to William Lane Craig, God is timeless without creation and temporal from the first moment of creation.<sup>2</sup> But Alan Padgett disagrees. In

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<sup>1</sup> As a general rule, it seems that advocates of divine timelessness would deny that such a state is possible (although see below for Craig's view). As Brian Leftow observes, "If God is timeless, there is no before or after in His life. . . . So if God is timeless and a world or time exists, there is no phase of His life during which He is without a world or time or has not yet decided to create them, even if the world or time had a beginning." In other words, if God is timeless, then creation exists timelessly with God in a state of ontological dependence upon His creative will and sustaining power. In such a scenario, God is causally and conceptually (but in no way temporally) "prior" to creation. Thus, if God did not exist, then creation would not exist either. And creation only exists because of the will and power of God who timelessly causes and sustains its existence. If we *were* to think of God existing alone without creation, and then bringing creation into being, He would clearly not be timeless (or, at the very least, no longer timeless). For in a case such as this, God would have undergone a change, which can only occur in (or with) some sort of time. In circumstances such as these, therefore, He would obviously be temporal—*not* timeless. For more on this, please see Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. William P. Alston (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 290-95. The quotation above is from p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> In light of what we just said above, Craig's position seems a bit odd (a fact which he himself readily admits). In his own defense Craig writes, "Detractors of this position simply assume that if God's life lacks earlier and later parts, then it has no phases. But why could there not be two phases of God's life, one timeless and one temporal, which are not related to each other as earlier and later?" To see what is confusing about this, we need to cite Craig yet again. Shortly after making the preceding comment, he writes the following: "God existing without creation is changelessly alone, and no event disturbs this complete tranquility. There is no before, no after, no temporal passage, no future phase of His life. There is just God." See William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 235-36. But as William Hasker has observed, this position at least *appears* incoherent. For from the first Craig quotation, we might infer that he is saying that God is *both* timeless *and* temporal concurrently (in some difficult to understand sense). These would be the "two phases of God's life . . . which are not related to each other as earlier and later." But Craig doesn't believe this—and his later statement makes this clear. He explicitly holds that there is a "phase" of God's life in which He exists "changelessly alone" without creation. At the same time, he also holds that "there is no future phase" of God's life in this timeless state (and how could there be, since God is timeless in this phase?). But creation begins to exist, and God enters into time at the first moment of creation. But if God exists alone *without* creation, and creation comes into being (which inaugurates God's temporal phase, in which He exists *with* creation), then how can it be that this temporal phase is *neither* after *nor* concurrent with His timeless phase? Admittedly, the difficulty may be

his view, God should be thought of as “relatively timeless”—both before and after creation. By “relatively timeless” Padgett does *not* mean that God is timeless in an absolute sense. He describes his view in these words:

I distinguish two senses of ‘timeless.’ When ‘time’ means duration in the abstract, ‘timeless’ will mean that no duration ever occurs in the life of that which is timeless. Something ‘timeless’ in this sense would lack any extension or location in *any* time whatsoever (Pike, *Timelessness*, 7). On the other hand, by a ‘time’ one may mean a system of Measured Time. In this case, something will be ‘timeless’ if it does not exist within any Measured Time. Measured Time Words, then, would not truly apply to that which is timeless. The former sense is a non-durational timelessness, while the later sense is a durational timelessness. We can distinguish between these two senses by calling the former an ‘absolute’ timelessness, and the latter a ‘relative’ timelessness. I will argue that God is timeless in a relative sense, and not in an absolute sense.<sup>3</sup>

In Padgett’s view, although God is described as “relatively timeless,” He is really temporal. It’s just that His temporal existence is distinct from the “measured time” of our physical universe. Padgett defines “measured time” as “a temporal system which can be given a distinct metrication.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, “measured time” is capable of being *measured*, whether by the rotation of the earth on its axis, the rush of sand through an hourglass, or the “vibrations of

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due to our own limited understanding and (generally time-bound) linguistic concepts, but there seems to be something strange (or at least a bit peculiar) going on here. For more on this, see William Hasker, “Book Review: Gregory E. Ganssle (Ed.), *God and Time*; William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity*,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53, no. 2 (April 2003): 114.

<sup>3</sup> Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1992), 19. Padgett alludes to Nelson Pike’s description of divine timelessness, which would be representative of what Padgett refers to as “absolute timelessness”. Pike describes God’s timelessness in this way: “First, if God is timeless, He has no duration, i.e., He lacks temporal extension. . . . Let it be true that the universe has a history that is indefinitely extended both forward and backward in time. The history of the universe has no temporal limits. Still, the world has a history. It is, as it were, ‘spread out in time’. This is what is denied of God when it is said that His life lacks duration. It is not just that the life of God lacks temporal limits: the point is that it has no temporal spread at all. Secondly, if God is timeless, God also lacks temporal location. God did not exist *before* Columbus discovered America nor will He exist *after* the turn of the century.” See Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1970), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, 7.

cesium atoms” in an atomic clock.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the time in which God exists is said to lack any intrinsic metric by which it could be measured. In this sense, it is “infinite and immeasurable.”<sup>6</sup>

In this paper I want to analyze and evaluate Craig and Padgett’s debate concerning whether or not we should think of God as existing in some sort of amorphous, undifferentiated time prior to creation. Since Padgett denies that God’s time can be measured, there are essentially two key questions which we must seek to answer: (1) Is it possible to divide God’s pre-creation time into distinct temporal intervals? (2) If there are such pre-creation intervals, would Padgett’s view entail that an actually infinite number of them transpired prior to creation?<sup>7</sup>

I will argue, with Craig, that the answer to both of these questions is “Yes.” It is thus implausible to claim that God existed temporally prior to creation, for this would imply that He has existed for an actually infinite number of distinct temporal intervals (which is impossible). Hence, *if there is a state in which God exists alone without creation*, then He should be thought of as timeless in such a state.<sup>8</sup>

In order to help us get a feel for each of their positions and the arguments they use to support and defend them, I will first chronicle the relevant portions of the debate between Padgett and Craig. After examining each of their positions (along with the relevant responses and

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<sup>5</sup> Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Science Dictionary*, “s.v. “Atomic Clock,” Houghton Mifflin Company. [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/atomic clock](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/atomic%20clock) (accessed: July 16, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Alan G. Padgett, “Eternity as Relative Timelessness,” in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 107. In his review of this book, William Hasker makes an important (and in my view, correct) observation when he notes that, unlike other *Four Views* books, this one is not an entry-level text. Indeed, he thinks that this book would be most appropriately used in “an upper-level course in philosophical theology or metaphysics.” Since I will be quoting from portions of this text throughout this paper, I think it’s important to recognize it as a legitimate and authoritative source of information on the issues it addresses. This is particularly the case when it comes to analyzing the views of Craig and Padgett themselves. The citation from Hasker can be found in Hasker, “Book Review,” 112.

<sup>7</sup> Although it may not be necessary to state this, I am assuming that these temporal intervals have some actual (non-zero) duration. In other words, these are not durationless instants, but actual intervals of time.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, if God is absolutely timeless, then such a state may be impossible (as Leftow has argued). But for the purpose of this paper, I am only concerned to argue against the notion that God is temporally prior to creation. This would be consistent with either Craig’s or Leftow’s position.

counter-responses), I will then offer my own analysis and evaluation of the debate, including why I think that Craig has made the stronger case.

Both Craig and Padgett agree that the “chief difference” between them concerns the issue of “metric conventionalism with respect to time.”<sup>9</sup> Craig thinks the doctrine of metric conventionalism is false, whereas Padgett thinks it is true.<sup>10</sup> This is a fascinating debate, which has important implications for how we think about God’s relationship to time and creation.

## The Debate

### *Padgett’s Position*

Padgett claims that God’s time has no intrinsic metric. “There is nothing in eternity,” he writes, “that could act as a kind of ‘intrinsic metric’ for the time of God. It would seem, then,

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<sup>9</sup> William Lane Craig, “Response to Alan G. Padgett,” in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 115. See also Alan G. Padgett, “Response to William Lane Craig,” in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 165.

<sup>10</sup> To add yet another layer of difficulty to our discussion, Craig and Padgett seem to disagree about what the doctrine of metric conventionalism actually *means*. In Craig’s view, the question of time’s metric has to do with whether “there is an objective fact about the comparative lengths of nonnested temporal intervals.” See William Lane Craig, “Response to Critics,” in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 183. According to Craig, metric conventionalism denies that the lengths of non-overlapping temporal intervals can be objectively compared. However, Padgett describes metric conventionalism a bit differently. According to him, “Any area of natural science establishes certain units of measure for its work. Some of these are natural or intrinsic to the object of study, for example, the mass of a material object. Some physical properties, however, are extrinsic, relative to the situation in which the measure is taking place. The weight of an object is like this. The same object weighs much less on the moon than it does on the earth—and even less in outer space. Now which kind of measure is *time* for physical objects? Strange as it may seem, contemporary physics has taught us that the measure or metric of time is not intrinsic or absolute. . . . The measurement of temporal intervals depends on the choice of a clock and the inertial frame of reference in which the ‘clock’ and the events are placed. Even observers using the same clock will measure the same temporal interval differently, if they are moving at great speeds relative to each other . . . . Metric conventionalism with respect to temporal measure is a fact of our universe. God has created the world that way.” See Padgett, “Response to William Lane Craig,” 165-66. However, Craig objects that Padgett has confused metric conventionalism with time dilation. According to Craig, the doctrine of metric conventionalism actually holds “that *within a single reference frame* there is no objective fact about the comparative lengths of two nonoverlapping temporal intervals.” See Craig, “Response to Critics,” 183n5. Fortunately, the argument of this paper does not depend on which definition is correct. If it is plausible to believe that God’s pre-creation time (as Padgett understands it) can be divided into distinct temporal intervals, and if these intervals are part of a beginningless series, then this would entail that an actually infinite number of such intervals transpired prior to God’s act of creation. And this, as we will see, would render Padgett’s view highly improbable (if not impossible).

that God is not in any Measured Time.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, prior to the creation of the physical universe, there just *isn't* anything that could serve as an “intrinsic metric” for God’s time. This is because, in Padgett’s view, “All temporal measure is dependent on the laws of nature, and on the choice of some clock to act as a standard for temporal measure.”<sup>12</sup> If the laws of nature do not yet exist, and if all temporal measure is dependent upon them, then it follows that no standard of temporal measure *could* exist prior to creation. Hence, “before creation, no amount of time passed. . . . God existed in a nonfinite temporal duration, but not in a finite (or even infinite) *amount* of time.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Craig’s Critique*

Although Craig believes that God is, in fact, timeless without creation, he nonetheless thinks that Padgett has erred in claiming that God’s time has no intrinsic metric. According to Craig, who appears to follow Isaac Newton’s view of the matter, “The metric of time has to do with the comparative extents of nonoverlapping temporal intervals. For Newton time has an objective metric; for two temporal intervals *ab* and *cd* there is an objective fact of the matter concerning their comparative extents: either  $ab=cd$ , or  $ab>cd$ , or  $ab<cd$ .”<sup>14</sup> Thus, in his initial critique of Padgett, Craig argues that even prior to creation it would make sense to think of God’s time as possessing an objective metric. For even in the complete absence of the laws of

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<sup>11</sup> Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, 127. Padgett seems to hold that God’s time *would* have an intrinsic metric if its structure were in some sense *atomic* (which he denies). He writes, “If space were not a continuum . . . and there were some tiny part of our space that was the smallest bit, and these bits had an average size that was always the same, then space would have an intrinsic metric. Any part of our space could be measured as the sum of these bits in it, and this measure would be objective. But I do not believe that space has an intrinsic metric. And I find it very hard to conceive how real time (pure duration) could have an intrinsic metric. Is there a smallest amount of time?” See Alan G. Padgett, “Can History Measure Eternity? A Reply to William Craig,” *Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 1991): 334.

<sup>12</sup> Padgett, “Eternity as Relative Timelessness,” 105.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Craig, “Response to Alan G. Padgett,” 116.

nature, the temporal intervals that comprise God's time could still be objectively compared as to length.

### *Padgett's Response*

In his initial response to his critics, Padgett admits that on his view temporal "intervals are part of God's eternity." What he denies, however, "is that there is any sense to the measure of those intervals."<sup>15</sup> He contends that Craig's critique utterly confuses "*comparative size* with *metric*." While he agrees that the *comparative size* of two intervals can be invariant for different observers in different inertial frames of reference, he insists (in light of the Special Theory of Relativity) that "the same temporal interval . . . can be *measured* as being very different" for these different observers. And these measurements, while legitimate in their own frame of reference, "cannot be properly extrapolated into an absolute or intrinsic metric."<sup>16</sup> For these reasons, Padgett doesn't see "how the invariance of comparative size (one thing's being longer than another in time or space)" is of any help in arriving at the notion of an intrinsic metric.<sup>17</sup>

### *Craig's Position*

Craig sees genuine value in Padgett's position, for if it is true, it would certainly provide a way of escape from some of the rather odd features of Craig's own perspective. In particular, it would allow us to simply affirm that God existed temporally *prior* to creation (an affirmation which Craig's view does not allow him to make, and which leads to some of the difficulties mentioned earlier). In addition, by asserting that God's time lacks any intrinsic

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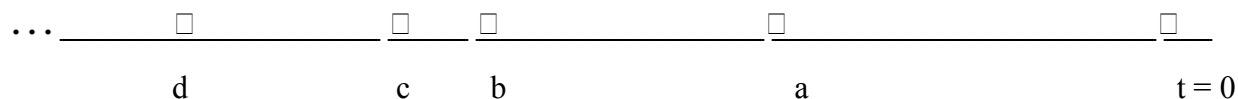
<sup>15</sup> Alan G. Padgett, "Response to Critics," in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 126.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

metric, Padgett's view appears to have the added advantage of not becoming entangled in the problematic assertion that God existed for an infinite amount of time prior to creation.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the difficulty is that Craig doesn't believe that Padgett's position is actually true. Recurring once again to the issue of metric conventionalism, which holds that distinct temporal intervals cannot be objectively compared with regard to length, Craig observes that this doctrine does not insist that absolutely "no intervals can be objectively compared with respect to length."<sup>19</sup> For in fact, even metric conventionalism recognizes *some* legitimate comparisons. To help us see the point, Craig offers the following figure:<sup>20</sup>



The figure shows various "intervals in a metrically amorphous time prior to the moment of creation" at  $t = 0$ .<sup>21</sup>

Now according to Craig, while metric conventionalism does not allow us to make objective length comparisons between the intervals  $dc$  and  $cb$ , it does permit us to recognize "an objective difference in length between  $da$  and  $ca$  . . . namely  $da > ca$  . . . . For in the case of intervals that are proper parts of other intervals, the proper parts are factually shorter than their encompassing parts."<sup>22</sup> But if this is so, then it implies that God existed through a "beginningless series of longer and longer intervals" prior to creating the physical universe.<sup>23</sup> And this is

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<sup>18</sup> William Lane Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," in *God & Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 157.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. The emphasis here is my own.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

problematic because it entails that God has existed through an actually infinite number of temporal intervals prior to the moment of creation. Thus, concludes Craig, “the amorphous time prior to creation would be infinite, even though we cannot compare the lengths of separate intervals within it.”<sup>24</sup> But why is it problematic to assert that God existed through an infinite number of temporal intervals prior to creation?

Craig offers two philosophical arguments in support of the conclusion that the past must be finite.<sup>25</sup> The first argument is based on the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things existing in the real world:<sup>26</sup>

1. An actual infinite cannot exist.<sup>27</sup>
2. A beginningless series of equal past intervals of time is an actual infinite.<sup>28</sup>
3. Therefore, a beginningless series of equal past intervals of time cannot exist.

In support of the first premise Craig points out that if an actually infinite number of things could exist in the real world, then all sorts of absurdities would result.<sup>29</sup> He illustrates the point through a discussion of “Hilbert’s Hotel,” a hotel with an actually infinite number of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Craig has defended these arguments at length against various objections that might be brought against them. For those interested in pursuing these debates, please see, William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1979); William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). Other examples of scholars who advocate or defend such arguments include: Steven B. Cowan, “A Reductio Ad Absurdum of Divine Temporality,” *Religious Studies* 32, no. 3 (September 1996): 371-78; Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988; reprint, 2002), 37-39; Pamela M. Huby, “Kant or Cantor? That the Universe, If Real, Must Be Finite in Both Space and Time,” *Philosophy* 46, no. 176 (April 1971): 121-32; J. P. Moreland, “A Response to a Platonistic and to a Set-Theoretic Objection to the Kalam Cosmological Argument,” *Religious Studies* 39, no. 4 (December 2003): 373-90.

<sup>26</sup> Although the argument gets formulated in slightly different ways in different contexts, the version cited here is the one most relevant for our present purposes. See Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 221.

<sup>27</sup> Craig distinguishes between a *potential* infinite, which is a collection of members that is *growing toward infinity* (but will never actually reach it), and an *actual* infinite—a collection of members which *really is infinite*. See Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Craig’s reference to “*equal past intervals*” here is not important. Whether the intervals are equal or not, a beginningless series of such intervals would entail an actual infinite (which is impossible).

<sup>29</sup> Craig, *Time and Eternity*.



rooms.<sup>30</sup> Unlike a typical hotel, with a finite number of rooms, “Hilbert’s Hotel” is always able to accommodate new guests—even when all of its rooms are already full! Indeed, even if an actually infinite number of new guests arrive, each hoping to have a room for the night, the manager could easily accommodate all of them. All he has to do, says Craig, is shift every current occupant into a room number twice his own (e.g. the person in room #1 gets moved to room #2, the person in room #2 gets moved to room #4, etc.). By means of this strategy, all of the odd numbered rooms are made available, and the infinite number of new guests can each get a room of their own. And yet, before these guests arrived, all the rooms were taken! These “sorts of absurdities,” says Craig, “show that it is impossible for an actually infinite number of things to exist.”<sup>31</sup>

In support of the second premise, Craig observes that if time is truly beginningless, then an actually infinite number of equal temporal intervals (e.g. seconds, hours, etc.) will have elapsed prior to the present moment.<sup>32</sup> Since the argument’s conclusion follows logically from the premises, and since the premises are arguably more plausible than their denials, it appears that we have a sound and successful argument for the finitude of the past (which is, of course, contrary to Padgett’s position).

Craig’s second argument for the finitude of the past is based on the impossibility of forming an actually infinite series via successive addition:<sup>33</sup>

1. A collection formed by successive addition cannot be actually infinite.
2. The series of equal past intervals of time is a collection formed by successive addition.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 222-23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 226. Again, the standard of measure applied to such intervals really doesn’t matter. So long as the intervals are of some non-zero temporal duration, and so long as there have been an actually infinite number of them, the argument will work.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 226-29. The actual statement of the argument occurs on p. 227.

3. Therefore, the series of equal past intervals of time cannot be actually infinite.

Craig takes the first premise to be the most important. In support of it, he observes that no matter how much time one has, one can never form an actually infinite collection by adding one member after another. After all, “since one can always add one more before arriving at infinity, it is impossible to reach actual infinity.”<sup>34</sup>

Regarding the second premise, Craig maintains that it is only denied by those who advocate a static (or tenseless) theory of time.<sup>35</sup> However, since Padgett rejects the static view,<sup>36</sup> this argument would also appear to be germane in arguing against Padgett’s position that time had no beginning.

On the basis of these two arguments, then, Craig concludes that time began with the creation of the physical universe. He thus conceives of God as timeless without creation and temporal from the first moment of creation.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Padgett’s Critique*<sup>38</sup>

In his critique of Craig’s position, Padgett argues (on behalf of metric conventionalism) that modern physics has taught us “that the measure or metric of time is not intrinsic or absolute.” This is because different observers, moving at very high speeds relative to one another, “will measure the same temporal interval differently.”<sup>39</sup> And if this is true even for

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>36</sup> See Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, 82-121.

<sup>37</sup> Craig, “Timelessness and Omnitemporality,” 159-60.

<sup>38</sup> It’s important to understand that the two arguments by Craig against the infinity of the past occur in his book, *Time and Eternity*. These arguments are *not* part of the discussion in his chapter on “Timelessness and Omnitemporality” in the book, *God & Time: Four Views*. For this reason, Padgett, in his response to Craig in the latter book, naturally does not address these arguments. I included these arguments in the discussion of Craig’s position because they are an important element in this debate (and an important part of the argument of this paper). But since these arguments were *not* explicitly part of the debate between Padgett and Craig in the *Four Views* book, we should not expect a response to these arguments from Padgett in the present discussion.

<sup>39</sup> Padgett, “Response to William Lane Craig,” 166.

different observers in the physical universe, Padgett reasons, then how much more should we think it true of God, who occupies (relative to us) a completely unique, transcendent reference frame. In Padgett's view, there is simply no way in which we can coherently apply our temporal measures to the reference frame of God. How could we possibly know anything about the way time lapses in God's unique reference frame?

Padgett asks us to consider a time in God's eternity "before the First Change."<sup>40</sup> This time would allow for "the possibility of change," even though it would (in itself) be changeless. Padgett describes this time as one of "nonfinite, eternal duration," and insists that such a time *cannot* be divided into distinct temporal intervals.<sup>41</sup> In this way, he rejects the applicability of Craig's illustration (which divided God's pre-creation time into distinct temporal intervals) and claims that the illustration is simply irrelevant to the view that he (i.e. Padgett) actually holds.

Padgett then goes on the attack. He crafts an argument which is alleged to show that "time is the dimension of the *possibility* of change."<sup>42</sup> In other words, if there is no time, then change is strictly impossible, for all change requires time in which to occur. Hence, while there can be time without change, there cannot be change without time. But if this is so, says Padgett, then it is incoherent for Craig to claim "that in the nonfinite eternity before the First Change, God was fully timeless."<sup>43</sup> For if God was fully timeless, then there could be no change! Thus, Craig's view must be false, for he claims that God is timeless without creation. And if God is timeless without creation, then He cannot bring the universe into being because (on Padgett's view) such a change would require that God in some sense be temporal. He thus concludes that

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 167. I will attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction between this and Padgett's earlier statement, which admitted temporal intervals as part of God's eternity, in my analysis and evaluation of the debate a bit later.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 169.

“even before the First Change, it was *possible* for God to change. And so even before the First Change, God was temporal in some (rather weak) sense.”<sup>44</sup>

### *Craig's Response*

In Craig's final response, he maintains that Padgett is confused about the notion of metric conventionalism. Whereas Padgett attempts to justify his appeal to this doctrine by referring to the fact that different observers, moving very rapidly relative to one another in different reference frames, will measure the same time interval differently, Craig claims that this has nothing to do with metric conventionalism! Rather, says Craig, “metric conventionalism holds that *within a single reference frame* there is no objective fact about the comparative lengths of two nonoverlapping temporal intervals.”<sup>45</sup>

But do such intervals actually exist in the amorphous time “before the First Change”? Padgett claims they do not. But Craig maintains that they do—at least so long as Padgett's view retains an understanding of time which identifies its topological structure with that of a line.<sup>46</sup> In that case, says Craig, “distinct temporal intervals can be identified within it even if it is metrically amorphous.”<sup>47</sup> The reasoning behind this claim deserves to be quoted in full:

. . . a line is a one-dimensional manifold of specifiable points ordered by a relation of betweenness: if  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$  are three points on a line, then one of the points (say  $y$ ) is between the other two. Therefore distinct intervals  $xy$  and  $yz$  exist as part of the line, even if there is no objective matter of fact concerning the comparative lengths of  $xy$  and  $yz$ . Moreover, even on metric conventionalism  $xz > yz$ , since the latter is a proper part of the former. The points, or instants, of time are ordered by unique *earlier than/later than* relations. If time did not begin to exist, then there are instants  $w$ ,  $v$ ,  $u$ , . . . earlier than  $x$  on the timeline. Therefore there is a beginningless series of longer and longer temporal intervals prior to any instant  $z$ :  $yz$ ,  $xz$ ,  $wz$ , . . . , even granted metric conventionalism.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Craig, “Response to Critics,” 183n5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 182-83.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

But does Padgett think of pre-creation time in terms of a line? Craig recognizes that he may not, but in that case he thinks it's very difficult to call such a thing *time*. He argues that if Padgett rejects the view that pre-creation time is line-like, then he is left with something that is more like a point. And this is problematic for Padgett's position. For if pre-creation time is "topologically pointlike," then it would seem to have "no past, present or future within it nor any instants or intervals earlier or later than one another."<sup>49</sup> And this, Craig thinks, actually looks more like a state of timelessness than temporality.

Finally, Craig responds to Padgett's charge that his view is incoherent. While he agrees with Padgett that if there is no time there is no change, he thinks that Padgett has erred in asserting that in the absence of time change is strictly impossible. What is rather true, says Craig, is the following proposition: "It is not possible that no duration occurs and that change occurs."<sup>50</sup> Hence, in Craig's view, it is not incoherent to affirm that a timeless God creates the universe (thus bringing about a change). The change obviously does not occur *in* time; rather, it occurs *with* time. Time begins with the first change at the moment of creation. Craig offers the following analogy to help us grasp his point:

The initial Big Bang singularity is not considered to be part of time, but to constitute a boundary to time. Nevertheless, it is causally connected to the universe. In an analogous way, perhaps we could say that God's timeless eternity is, as it were, a boundary of time which is causally, but not temporally, prior to the origin of the universe.<sup>51</sup>

We have now covered the relevant data of the debate between Padgett and Craig on the topics of God, time and creation. It is now time to turn our attention to an analysis and evaluation of this debate.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>51</sup> Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 236.

### **An Analysis and Evaluation of the Debate**

We have seen that Craig claims that God is timeless without creation, whereas Padgett contends that He is “relatively timeless” (i.e. God is temporal, but exists in an undifferentiated and immeasurable time prior to creation). How might we adjudicate this debate? Is one of these positions more plausible than the other? If so, which one?

Padgett insists that God’s pre-creation time *cannot* be divided into distinct temporal intervals.<sup>52</sup> Now this statement appears to contradict another statement in which he acknowledged that there were such intervals in God’s eternity.<sup>53</sup> In this case, however, I think that we should give Padgett the benefit of the doubt and assume that in the first instance he is thinking *only* of God’s *pre-creation* time, while in the latter instance he has in mind God’s *post-creation* time.

So how might we determine whether or not God’s pre-creation time is capable of being divided into distinct temporal intervals? Although much of the debate hangs upon whether or not such intervals exist, it is not entirely obvious how this question should be answered. Therefore, let’s assume for the moment that Padgett is correct and see where this assumption might take us.

If God’s pre-creation time cannot be divided into intervals (since, according to Padgett, it lacks any kind of intrinsic metric and “measured time” does not yet exist), then it would seem as if he could admit the plausibility of Craig’s arguments against an actually infinite past, but deny that the arguments are relevant to his model.<sup>54</sup> This is because, in Padgett’s model, the past would not be composed of an *infinite* number of temporal intervals. Although in Padgett’s view time never begins to exist (and is, in this sense, *nonfinite*), nevertheless, the

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<sup>52</sup> Padgett, “Response to William Lane Craig,” 167.

<sup>53</sup> Padgett, “Response to Critics,” 126.

<sup>54</sup> Indeed, this is essentially what he does. See Padgett, “Response to William Lane Craig,” 167.

number of *intervals* in God's past eternity *is finite!* This is because Padgett is only willing to count the pre-creation time period as *one* interval.<sup>55</sup>

But why should we think that God's pre-creation time has no intervals (or no more than *one*)? Is it because prior to creation there is no change? This explanation sounds possible, although it does face potential difficulties.<sup>56</sup> However, if Craig is right about Padgett's view retaining the topological structure of time as a line, then it may end up *requiring* intervals. Strangely, it all seems to depend on what a *line* actually is!

According to Euclid, in his second and third definitions from Book One of the *Elements*, "A *line* is breadthless length" the extremities of which "are points."<sup>57</sup> Given this definition, if Padgett does conceive of the structure of God's pre-creation time in terms of a line, then it would appear that Craig is probably correct in claiming that this time can be divided into distinct temporal intervals. For according to Padgett, God's pre-creation time has no beginning *point*. Hence, even if the moment of creation were regarded as one point on the line, we would still require some *earlier* point to have a real line. But wherever this "earlier" point is located, the line continues "beyond" it into the past (since time has no beginning). But in that case, if what we have is still a line (as one would naturally assume), then there must be a point "earlier" still (and so on for all eternity). Thus, it appears that there would have to be an actually infinite number of points in the *earlier than* direction of the line going back from creation into the beginningless past. If this is correct, then Padgett is forced to deal with Craig's two arguments against the possibility of an actual infinite.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Helm argues that even in such an undifferentiated time, it is probable that there would be a succession of mental events in God's mind. "But if this is so," claims Helm, "then time could not be undifferentiated before the creation but would be marked by a series of mental events in the divine mind." But a beginningless series of mental events "is ruled out by the arguments for the impossibility of an actual infinite." See Helm, *Eternal God*, 38-9.

<sup>57</sup> Euclid, *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, trans. Sir Thomas L. Heath, vol. 11, *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 1.

But *does* Padgett conceive of God’s pre-creation time in terms of a line? Again, it’s difficult to say, but the weight of the evidence seems to indicate that he does. For example, we’ve seen that Padgett distinguishes his “relatively timeless” view from that of “absolute timelessness.”<sup>58</sup> He cites Pike’s definition of timelessness as representative of the “absolutely timeless” view. According to that definition, a timeless being lacks all temporal extension and location.<sup>59</sup> But Padgett argues that God is not timeless in this sense. Rather, God is “relatively timeless” and does have temporal extension and location—even prior to creation. He describes this as a “durational timelessness.”

But is it possible for God’s pre-creation time to have duration, but no intervals? If Padgett holds that God has temporal extension and location, doesn’t this seem to imply that he is conceiving of God’s time in terms of a line (instead of, say, a point)? Can one have temporal duration, or extension, with no time that is *earlier than* or *later than* another? And if not, then how does one avoid distinct temporal intervals of some sort? On the other hand, if Padgett denies that God’s pre-creation time can be characterized by *earlier than* or *later than* distinctions, then doesn’t this imply that he is conceiving of God’s time as “topologically pointlike” (i.e. no past or future, no instants or intervals of time)? And isn’t Craig correct in saying that this looks more like a state of timelessness than temporality?<sup>60</sup>

It seems to me, therefore, that Craig has put Padgett into the following dilemma: (1) Either God’s pre-creation time has the topological structure of a line, or it does not. (2) If it does, then it would seem to consist of “specifiable points ordered by a relation of betweenness” (with all that this implies concerning temporal intervals and the infinity of the past)<sup>61</sup>. (3) If it does not, then God’s pre-creation time would seem to be more fittingly modeled after that of a point. And

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<sup>58</sup> Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Craig, “Response to Critics,” 184.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.



this looks more like a state of timelessness than temporality. (4) Thus, it would appear that Padgett must either embrace divine timelessness without creation (which is Craig's view), or he must embrace an infinite past (a position he not only rejects, but which would also involve him in having to confront the challenge of Craig's arguments against an actual infinite). But since Craig's arguments against an actual infinite would make an infinite past impossible, it would seem as if Padgett must adopt Craig's view.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted an analysis and evaluation of the debate between William Lane Craig and Alan Padgett regarding the nature of God's relationship to time and creation. After introducing some of the key issues, I attempted to set forth the relevant portions of the debate, including the relevant responses and counter responses which each author had for the other's comments.

Although Padgett denies that God's pre-creation time can be measured, we've seen that so long as this time is conceived to have the topological structure of a line, it can be plausibly divided into an actually infinite number of distinct temporal intervals. But since there are persuasive arguments against an actual infinite, this view must be rejected as improbable. For this reason, it seems to me that Craig's position is more persuasive than Padgett's. That is, it seems more plausible to me that God is timeless (as opposed to temporal) without creation.

Of course, I have not even attempted to consider whether or not God is absolutely timeless. If He is, then there may not even *be* a state in which God exists alone without creation! But this is a deep and difficult issue, which I am not yet prepared to address.

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