

There is No Time for God

von

Muhammad Legenhausen

**Bonn
2026**

Es gibt keine Zeit für Gott

Muhammad Legenhausen

Qom, Iran

Zusammenfassung

Ich habe in diesem Artikel argumentiert, dass temporale Lage räumliche Lage impliziert. In der klassischen islamischen Physik liegt das daran, dass Sein in der Zeit Bewegung impliziert. In der zeitgenössischen Physik liegt das daran, dass Raum und Zeit relativ sind. Es gibt weder reine Zeit noch reinen Raum, sondern nur Raumzeit. Da Gott keine räumliche Ausdehnung besitzt und nicht unabhängig vom Raum in der Zeit existieren kann, folgt daraus, dass er auch nicht »in« der Zeit existieren kann. Er muss folglich vollständig außerhalb der Raumzeit sein. Weil Personsein temporal ist, kommen wir zur Schlussfolgerung, dass Gott keine Person ist. Trotzdem könnten wir zustimmen, dass die Sprache der Schrift personal ist. Ich habe vorgeschlagen, dass wir uns Gott als jemanden vorstellen können, der mit uns in der Zeit lebt, aber wir sollten verstehen, dass dies eine bildliche Verwendung der Sprache beinhaltet, eine Art Fiktionalismus, von dem wir in unserer philosophischen Theologie Abstand nehmen sollten.

Schlüsselbegriffe

Fiktionalismus, Personalismus, Raumzeit, Relativität, Zeitlosigkeit

There is No Time for God

Abstract

In this article, I have argued that temporal location implies spatial location. In classical Islamic physics, this is because being in time implies movement. In contemporary physics, this is because space and time are relative. There is neither pure time nor pure space, but only spacetime. Since God has no spatial extension and cannot exist independently of space in time, it follows that he cannot exist »in« time either. He must therefore be completely outside of spacetime. Because personhood is temporal, we come to the conclusion that God is not a person. Nevertheless, we could agree that the language of Scripture is personal. I have suggested that we can imagine God as someone who lives with us in time, but we should understand that this involves a figurative use of language, a kind of fictionalism that we should refrain from in our philosophical theology.

Keywords

Fictionalism, Personalism, Space-time, Relativity, Timelessness

Sumario

En este artículo he argumentado que la ubicación temporal implica la ubicación espacial. En la física islámica clásica, esto se debe a que el ser en el tiempo implica movimiento. En la física contemporánea, esto se debe a que el espacio y el tiempo son relativos. No existe ni el tiempo puro ni el espacio puro, sino solo el espacio-tiempo. Dado que Dios no tiene extensión espacial y no puede existir en el tiempo independientemente del espacio, se deduce que tampoco puede existir »en« el tiempo. Por lo tanto, debe estar completamente fuera del espacio-tiempo. Dado que ser persona es temporal, llegamos a la conclusión de que Dios no es una persona. Sin

embargo, podríamos estar de acuerdo en que el lenguaje de las Escrituras es personal. He sugerido que podemos imaginar a Dios como alguien que vive con nosotros en el tiempo, pero debemos entender que esto implica un uso figurativo del lenguaje, una especie de ficcionalismo del que debemos distanciarnos en nuestra teología filosófica.

Palabras clave

ficcionalismo, personalismo, espacio-tiempo, relatividad, atemporalidad

Introduction

The title is multiply ambiguous; and sorting out the different meanings it can have may serve as an introduction to the topic. Someone might complain against the modern world that we have no time for God anymore. They might continue that we need to find ways to *make* time for God. This means setting aside time in our lives for prayer, worship, contemplation, and other ways to strengthen one's relationship with the divine. In another sense, one might claim that there is no time for God because God is too busy! However, we believe that God's power and mercy on His creation are so great that neither divine activities nor lack of divine interest could make Him have no time for us. Yet, it is not that God has plenty of time to spare, and will finally get around to us, no matter how much He has to do. So, it is not because He doesn't have *enough* time that there is no time for God; it is because having enough time or not just doesn't apply to God. People sometimes complain about being born at the wrong time; and they might express this feeling by saying, »This is no time for me.« God is not confined to anything that could be »the wrong time« for Him. Nevertheless, time is important for God. After all, in our scriptures there are references to the six days of creation. We believe that God has commanded us to pray at certain times every day, and that we are to fast in Ramadan, and that the hajj also has a special time. So, if there is no time for God, it is not because He is oblivious to it. It's not that time doesn't exist for God that there is no time for God. Time passes us by, while it cannot surpass God. Time is not *for* God in the sense that without it He couldn't get anything done. Time is not the sort of thing that we get stuck in while God is kept out. No space is big enough to contain God, even if it stretches out infinitely; and no duration is long enough to contain the divine lifetime. No space is too small to have no room for God, and no time too short to exclude His presence. So, the philosophers have traditionally taught that God is *atemporal*. God is not confined to any moment relative to which future and past are divided. Everything that exists is in God's possession, and is *for* God in their total dependence on Him; although time and space and the entire created world are not *for* God as things He needs in order to accomplish some further purpose or reach the fulfillment of His plans.

The insistence on divine atemporality is not to side with a transcendent theology over an immanent theology. In the same way that God can be immaterial without any separation from material things, He can be atemporal without leaving us waiting for Him in vain. He shows up for us in time if we have time for God, although there is no time for God, for God is not a spatiotemporal entity. In what follows, I will argue that divine timelessness is a consequence of the manner in which God is incorporeal and immaterial: God is nonspatial. Whatever is spatial or temporal is both, since either requires existence in spacetime. Since God is not in spacetime, He is neither in time nor space. While some writers distinguish *timelessness* from *atemporality*, I will use these terms interchangeably for the denial that God is in time. Those who hold that God is in time will be called *temporalists*.

In a short statement such as this, I will not be able to survey most of the arguments relevant to the controversy over divine timelessness. I will confine myself to three basic points:

First, given divine incorporeality, divine timelessness follows from the predominant views taken by the Muslim philosophers from Avicenna to Mulla Sadra and beyond, and is further supported by theories in contemporary physics that jettison time in favor of time-like distances in spacetime. Second, I will argue that the postulation of a special time, a metaphysical or divine time independent of spacetime, can best be defended as a form of religious fictionalism. Third, it will be suggested that passages in the Qur'ān that seem to imply a temporal deity are consistent with the thesis of divine timelessness.

The Measure of Motion

Contrary to prevalent interpretations, Aristotle never defined time as the measure of motion.¹ Nevertheless, subsequent commentators and the discussions of physics by the Muslim philosophers took this to be Aristotle's definition. Aristotle claimed that time is the number (*arithmos*) rather than the measure (*metron*) of motion or change. This means that motion implies time because it requires different moments, number; there are the moments before and after a change. A measure goes further by providing a scale. Alexander of Aphrodesias (c. 200) wrote an essay on time that was translated into Arabic (although the original Greek text has been lost). In it he retains Aristotle's wording of the claim that time is the number of motion, and takes this to be solely with reference to the outermost celestial sphere. He held that time is created by the moving instant of the »now«, but that this instant is mental and does not correspond to anything in the external world. He draws the conclusion that time is mental.² Aristotle also held that there would be no motions of the spheres without their souls; so, again, time depends on the mental. John Philoponos (c. 490-570) (known in Arabic as Yahya al-Nahwi) seemed to be indifferent to the difference between number and measure; and among the Muslim philosophers it was taken as common knowledge that Aristotle held time to be the measure of motion (*miqdār al-ḥaraka*). The Muslim philosophers also referred to Aristotle for using the outermost celestial sphere, the Sphere of Atlas, to establish the continuity of time; for if time is introduced with motion, every motion would appear to generate its own time. So, there had to be some framework within which the times of each motion could be coordinated. The Sphere of Atlas served this purpose, although it also introduced a conventional standard. The conventionality involved in the measure of time continues to be debated to this day.³

The Muslim philosophers did not rest content with the remarks on time by Aristotle and his commentary tradition. Avicenna (980-1037) claimed that there were two kinds of motion⁴, one of which has a psychological explanation: as that which is abstracted from finding differences in the accidents of a thing that is not in different parts of it.⁵ To resolve the contradiction, the thing is said to have the different accidents at different times, and to have changed. In this manner, the mind arrives at the concept of time through the experience of motion, including changes in accidents of several categories. According to Avicenna, the perception of duration arises from the mind's comparison of distinct moments, while its external basis lies in the ordered succession of motion. By conceptually reducing the duration of motion, one arrives at instantaneous motion, whose temporal correlate is the instant (*al-ān*), the real boundary between the prior and

¹ URSULA COOPE, *Time for Aristotle*, Oxford 2005.

² ROBERT W. SHARPLES, Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Time*, in: *Phronesis*, 27(1) (1982) 58-81.

³ TALAL A. DEBS / MICHAEL L. G. REDHEAD, *Objectivity, Invariance, and Convention: Symmetry in Physical Science*, Cambridge 2007.

⁴ AVICENNA, *The Physics of the Healing: Books I & II*, Provo 2009, II.I, 5f.

⁵ There were also controversies about what categories of accidents change to result in motion. Avicenna argued that motion occurs not only with change in spatial location, but also with change in position. Mulla Sadra would argue that there could be changes in any of the categories, including substance.

the posterior. Whereas Alexander of Aphrodesias regarded this as a purely conceptual division, Avicenna maintained that the instant corresponds to something real within the external continuum of motion and time.⁶

After Avicenna, the relation between time and motion was discussed for centuries. By the time we get to Fakhr al-Din Razi (1149 or 1150 - 1209), the discussions of time had become extremely complex. He divided them into those about the existence of time and questions about its nature.⁷ With regard to its existence, there were some who held time to be illusory.⁸ Of those who affirmed that time is real, some claimed that its existence had to be proved, while others held it to be obvious and without need of proof. While the peripatetics held time to require motion, Fakhr al-Din objects and ultimately settles on the »Platonic« view that time, or duration, is eternal and yet created. His main argument against the Aristotelian view is that one can be aware of time passing without noticing anything moving. Nevertheless, Razi held that temporal succession could only occur in corporeal entities, in substances whose accidents change, and, hence, that pure spirits and God are atemporal. There were debates among the Muslim theologians about whether only God is completely incorporeal. Some held that the souls retain a subtle or gaseous body even when separated from the corpse after death.

The predominant view among the Muslim peripatetics as well as Razi and other theologians was that temporality implies corporeality. While views of space and time have undergone tremendous changes with the development of modern physics, one thing that is shared between the classical Muslim thinkers and contemporary physicists is the idea that temporality implies spatial location.

Spacetime

Einstein's theories of special (STR) and general relativity (GR) have both revolutionized our understanding of time by fundamentally changing how time was treated in physics and how it was conceptualized in philosophy. For a recent reliable, informative and accessible introduction to these changes, I recommend Jennan Ismael's *Time: A Very Short Introduction*.⁹ Einstein's reconfiguration of space and time and its elaboration in Minkowski's *spacetime* have displaced the Newtonian notion of absolute simultaneity as well as any absolute differentiation between time and space. In Newton's mechanics, time was conceived as flowing uniformly and independent of motion and gravity, to serve as an external measure for all physical change. In Einstein's alternative framework, temporal intervals are inseparable from spatial arrangements: events occur within the four-dimensional structure of *spacetime*. Time is not a substance or universal measure but a relational dimension intertwined with the spatial one, and dependent on the state of motion from which entities in spacetime are measured or located.

In STR, the distinction between space and time is relative to an inertial frame. The frame rests on two core postulates: the constancy of the speed of light and *symmetry*, the equivalence of physical laws in all inertial reference frames. From these principles arise consequences such as time dilation and length contraction, both indicating that measures

⁶ JON MCGINNIS, Ibn Sina on the Now, in: American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, LXXIII(1) (1999) 73-106.

⁷ For the question of existence, see PHILIP ADAMSON, The Existence of Time in Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya, in: DAG N. HANNON / AMOS BERTOLACCI (ed.), The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Physics and Cosmology, Boston-Berlin 2018, 65-100; for the nature of time, see PHILIP ADAMSON / ALEXANDER LAMMER, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Platonist Account of the Essence of Time, in: AYMAN SHIHADDEH / JAN THIELE (ed.), Philosophical Theology in Islam: Later Ash'arism East and West, Boston 2020, 95-122.

⁸ The issue is still debated. See SAM BARON / KRISTIE L. MILLER / JONATHAN TALLANT, Out of Time: A Philosophical Study of Timelessness, Oxford 2022.

⁹ JENNAN ISMAEL, Time: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford 2021.

of duration and distance depend upon kinematic relations among events. In his highly acclaimed *What Makes Time Special?*, Craig Callender explains the relativity of simultaneity in greater detail.¹⁰ He and Ismael both make it clear that in special relativity there is no reference to an *absolute present* – to a universal »now« slicing the universe into past and future. What counts as »simultaneous« differs when assessed from different inertial frames. If two people are walking away from each other, the set of events that are simultaneous to the moment when they parted will not be the same. Although this is very counterintuitive, it has been definitively corroborated by empirical evidence. The conclusions to be drawn are that simultaneity is relative to velocity in an inertial frame and that we should not trust our intuitions about time.

GR extends these findings by adding another factor, gravitation, to which the curvature of spacetime is relative. The geometry of spacetime varies with the distribution of matter and energy. Spacetime curvature explains gravitational attraction: objects follow geodesics in a warped spacetime rather than responding to a force acting through Euclidean space. Callender explains how in general relativity, spacetime geometry itself evolves in interaction with matter and energy, rather than simply providing a fixed stage on which events unfold. This eliminates the possibility of anything having duration without being extended in spacetime. The nonexistence of an absolute present, independent of spacetime, is a structural feature of the universe: simultaneity is both relative and localized, constrained by the metric of spacetime.

According to STR, an event's temporal ordering is inseparable from its spatial coordination. To specify *when* something happens requires specifying *where* it happens. Time without spatial coordinates – »pure time« – becomes meaningless. Temporal sequence in STR is defined by the structure of spacetime: whether two events can be connected by a signal traveling below the speed of light determines their possible temporal relations. Thus, order in time reduces to spatiotemporal relations of light cones and worldlines, not to an absolute external flow.

It is not only STR and GR that make temporality imply spatiality. Quantum field theory (QFT) and string theory reinforce the interdependence of time and space. In QFT, fields are defined across spacetime points; creation and annihilation operators act within spacetime coordinates, so that each field mode extends over both spatial and temporal dimensions. The vacuum state – the lowest energy configuration – has structure only in a spacetime context. There is no meaningful »time-only« domain in which a field exists, since every quantum excitation presupposes spatial extension and causal propagation through spacetime.

Similarly, in string theory, the fundamental entities are not point particles but one-dimensional strings or higher-dimensional branes that vibrate and interact within a spacetime manifold. Their dynamics are mathematically expressed through worldsheet or worldvolume formulations, once again embedding time in a spatially parameterized setting. Any proposal of »pure temporality« lacking spatial extension destroys the geometric framework required for any physical interpretation. In both quantum field and string formulations, spacetime acts as the medium giving physical meaning to temporal development; without extension in spacetime, extension through time alone is nonsense.

The consequences are metaphysically decisive: any entity that participates in temporal succession must do so within spacetime. Contemporary physics recognizes no ontology of »pure temporal existence« detached from spatial structure. Temporal becoming is not an independent flow but the manifestation of changes within the spacetime continuum. The best physical theories we have jointly entail that existence in time is equivalent to existence as having a location within a spacetime manifold. Nothing is

¹⁰ CRAIG CALLENDER, *What Makes Time Special?*, Oxford 2017.

temporal unless it is spatial, or, better, spatiotemporal.

As Callender explains, both STR and GR, supplemented by QFT, contain no place for absolute temporal passage independent of spatial relations. Time, conceived as a dimension interwoven with the fabric of the universe, cannot be disassociated from the geometry and topology of that fabric. Consequently, any claim that something could exist »temporally« without position, extension, or spatial relation is incompatible with the explanatory structure of modern physics. What exists in time exists *spatiotemporally* – and the notion of a metaphysical time independent of all spatial parameters is conceptually incoherent within current theoretical physics. However, even if there is a preferred reference frame (or privileged foliation) allowing for an absolute difference between time and space, the frame can only be specified for both time and space. Anything existing in absolute time would still need to occupy at least one point in space. The upshot of this for theology is that God must be timeless if we agree that He is nonspatial. God must be atemporal because of physics, not because of a theological commitment to divine perfection that excludes temporal limitations or transcendence that puts God beyond the physical world, although these sorts of considerations have been used to bolster the case for divine timelessness. However, the decisive factor for the classical Muslim philosophers and theologians was physics. Time and motion were connected so tightly that there just couldn't be an entity that persisted through time without a body. In contemporary metaphysics, too, time and space are, if anything, even more tightly interwoven in spacetime. It is physics that casts doubt on absolute temporality, much more so than any theological considerations.

Time for God: Personalism

There are various reasons theologians of the twentieth century and beyond have sought to overturn the millennia old doctrine of divine timelessness. A popular argument is that God should be temporal to make sense of petitionary prayer.¹¹ However, petitionary prayer has been around as long as religion, and in the past the timelessness of God did not seem to stand in the way of prayers or their answers. I suspect that the rejection of timelessness has more to do with the allure of personalism.¹² The term »personalism« (der *Personalismus*) was coined by Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in his *Über die Religion* in 1799¹³, where it is contrasted with pantheism. Although Schleiermacher held that God is atemporal, in the later developments of personalism in the twentieth century, personhood was taken to imply temporality. The commitment to a view of God as a person brings an emphasis on God being a relational, responsive being capable of genuine interpersonal engagement with humans, through prayer, love, or moral inspiration, which is contrasted with an impersonal view that reduces God to a thing or power lacking any dynamism or responsiveness. Nevertheless, personalism has not always been taken to be incompatible with divine timelessness. A branch of personalism that goes through students of Edmund Husserl is represented in the theology of Pope John Paul II, who defended divine personhood and relationality without raising any doubts about the traditional Catholic teaching of divine timelessness. In philosophy of religion, divine timelessness

¹¹ For this and further arguments for temporalism in the context of open theism, see JOHN SANDERS / KLAUS VON STOSCH (ed.), *Divine Action: Challenges for Muslim and Christian Theology*, Paderborn 2022.

¹² See THOMAS D. WILLIAMS / JOHAN O. BENGTSOON, Personalism, in: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/personalism/> (accessed: 25.11.2025); JOHAN DE TAVERNIER, The Historical Roots of Personalism, in: *Ethical Perspectives* 16 (2009) 361-392.

¹³ FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), Berlin 2001, 170.

came under direct fire only in the late 20th century. In his *God and Timelessness*¹⁴, Nelson Pike offers a sustained argument against the doctrine that God is outside of time, in part, because he takes it that God is a person, and persons cannot do things definitive of personhood, like intending and responding, unless they are temporal. In the subsequent discussions of divine timelessness, an increasing number of philosophers of religion came to affirm divine temporality, so much so that Gregory E. Ganssle would claim: »Now, the dominant view among philosophers is that God is temporal. His eternal nature is thought of as being everlasting rather than timeless.«¹⁵

The options that have been presented fall into the following alternatives, assuming that God exists.

- I. God is a timeless person. (John Paul II)
- II. God is a person, and is therefore temporal. (Pike)

If one finds the arguments convincing that personhood requires temporality, a third option is also possible:

- III. God is not in time, and is therefore not a person.

Although the concept of person developed in Christian philosophy and theology and has no equivalent in Islamic philosophy, there is reason to attribute a denial of divine personhood to the Muslim philosophers (although there are exceptions). If, as Boethius taught, a person is a rational substance, Avicenna would have to deny that God is a person on both counts. According to Avicenna, God is not a substance. Any substance would need to have a cause to give existence to the quiddity by which the substance would be specified. So, the ultimate cause must be a source of existence independent of any quiddity.¹⁶ On the second count, according to Avicenna, God is not rational – not because He is *irrational*, but because God does not have a mind with mental faculties that could include reason.¹⁷ Furthermore, if God is not a person, he is not a timeless person; and if God is pure existence, or absolute existence, which is the characteristic teaching of Islamic philosophy since Mulla Sadra, then God is not a person.¹⁸ While personalists hold that the ultimate ground of all being is personal, the view one finds in Islamic philosophy is that the ultimate ground of all being is unqualified simple reality. Even if we are encouraged to relate to God in a personal way, it is also recognized that this manner of relating is due to human limitations. Anthropomorphic imagery is used for God in the Qur’ān, even as we are warned that God is far beyond what we imagine.

Although there are contemporary Catholic thinkers who deny the personhood of God and there are Muslim thinkers who affirm it, on the whole one of the most important differences between Christian and Muslim conceptions of God is that Christians have a personal view of divinity while Islamic philosophy rejects the view that God is a substance, and, hence, denies that God is a person.¹⁹

The difficulties that arise when one attempts to defend the claim that God is in time but not in space provide additional reason to deny that God is a person. The argument can be formulated as follows:

1. **God is nonspatial.** God is incorporeal. He is not a physical body and is

¹⁴ NELSON PIKE, *God and Timelessness*, London 1970.

¹⁵ GREGORY E. GANSSLE, *God and Time*, in: <https://iep.utm.edu/god-time/#H8> (accessed: 26.11.2025).

¹⁶ MUHAMMAD LEGENHAUSEN, *Ibn Sina’s Arguments Against God’s Being a Substance*, in: CHRISTIAN KANZIAN / IDEM. (ed.), *Substance and Attribute: Western and Islamic Traditions in Dialogue*, Frankfurt 2007, 117-143; IDEM., *Ibn Sina’s Concept of God*, in: *Israq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook 1* (2010) 317-344.

¹⁷ IDEM., *Does God Have a Mind?*, in: *Academy of Islamic Sciences and Culture*, Qom 2014, 158-202.

¹⁸ IDEM., *Is God a Person?*, in: *Religious Studies 22* (1986) 307-323.

¹⁹ THOMAS SCHÄRTL, *Rethinking the Concept of a Personal God*, in: DERS. / CHRISTOPH TAPP / VOLKER WEGENER (ed.), *Rethinking the Concept of a Personal God (STEP; 7)*, Münster 2016, 3-31, 27.

immaterial, and He has no spatial location or extension.²⁰

2. **Time and space are inextricably linked.** As described by modern physics, particularly general relativity, time and space form a single, dynamic entity called spacetime. Nothing can be »in« time without being »in« space.
3. **Conclusion I: God's being nonspatial implies that he is timeless.** Since God has no spatial extension (1) and cannot exist in time independently of space (2), it follows that he cannot exist »in« time either. He must, therefore, be outside of spacetime entirely.
4. **No timeless being can be a person.** Being a person requires intentional agency, and intentional agency is temporal.
5. **Conclusion II: God is not a person.** Since God is timeless (3) and no timeless being can be a person (4), God is not a person.

Some pantheists might deny (1). One could hold that God is extended through all of spacetime. Spacetime itself could be taken to be the location of God. This is usually rejected because it would imply that God has parts.²¹

I have argued above that temporal location implies spatial location. In classical Islamic physics, this is because being in time implies motion. In contemporary physics, this is because space and time are relative. There is no pure time and pure space, only spacetime. This supports (3). Next, I will consider how (3) might be denied. If it is accepted, however, and (4) is assumed, then from God's being nonspatial we can conclude that God is not a person.

Even if we conclude that God is not a person, we might agree that the language of scripture is personal, and that we often relate in religious life to God *as if* He were a person. The position that we are justified in so doing may be considered a kind of *fictionalism*. While some versions of religious fictionalism are atheistic, I will understand fictionalism to be a claim about religious language according to which what are recognized to be literally false propositions may be asserted, nevertheless, figuratively, where an assertion may be literally false but figuratively true.

Fictionalism and Absolute Time

Temporalists need to find some way that divine events, e.g. some specific act of divine will whereby a prayer is answered, can be coordinated as simultaneous with some event after the prayer. The kinds of »I-Thou« relationships valued by personalists who reject timelessness require two conditions:

- I. God must be in time and act in time.
- II. God's time must correlate with human time.

For God to be in time one or more of the following will be required:

- I.1. God persists from earlier to later, in the B-series.
- I.2. God persists in an A-series, past-present-future.
- I.3. There is a unique »now« for God.

The correlation with human time would ideally be one in which the divine now is the same as ours, and that our A and B series align with God's.

These requirements are exceedingly difficult to square with contemporary physics. There are

²⁰ There are entities in spacetime that lack bodies, such as geometrical structures in spacetime and quantum fields. If they were counted as incorporeal, incorporeality would not imply being outside of spacetime.

²¹ For a discussion of Mulla Sadra's criticism of pantheism, see MUHAMMAD LEGENHAUSEN, Mulla Sadra's Critique of Apophatic Mysticism and Pantheism, in: BERNHARD NITSCHKE / KLAUS VON STOSCH / MUNA TATARI (ed.), *Gott – jenseits von Monismus und Theismus?*, Paderborn 2017, 309-321.

two responses to this problem. First, one can propose an alternative interpretation of spacetime, a heroic undertaking to say the least. Second, one can give physical time over to the physicists and posit a special time for God, a metaphysical time (often taken to coordinate with human phenomenological time) without need for physics. Both strategies force divine temporalists into implausible positions.

Several authors have taken the heroic route, but none has had an impact in the philosophy of religion as great as that of William Lane Craig.²² Craig proposes a neo-Lorentzian interpretation of STR according to which spacetime has a privileged foliation with respect to which an absolute time can be identified. A foliation is a way of slicing up spacetime, as if into something like pages in a book, where everything on a page is simultaneous. A temporal order is then understood as the ordering of the pages; so that there are different temporal orders for different foliations. STR says that there are many foliations consistent with physical laws, so that temporal and spatial relations are relative to foliation. Craig's proposal is that one of the foliations is special or privileged and allows for the identification of absolute time. On Craig's view, God is atemporal prior to the creation of the universe and is temporal afterward.

Craig and other proponents of neo-Lorentzian view have devised their accounts in such a way as to be consistent with STR, according to which there is no privileged foliation. While the project of saving an absolute time is the subject of considerable controversy in the philosophy of religion, physicists have mostly ignored it. The main reasons are Occam's razor: the standard interpretation of STR is the simplest, and the observation that there is nothing in the empirical data to justify supplementation of the physics of spacetime with a privileged foliation or a preferred inertial frame. Craig claims that there is one foliation that is superior to all others, and has argued that his view actually fits better with the data than STR with the standard interpretation.²³ Although I am not competent to judge the issue²⁴, I am skeptical about efforts to reinterpret physical theories whose only advantages are that they align better with metaphysical intuitions and religious views. Furthermore, I fail to see how God could be in time without being spatial, even if the neo-Lorentzian program were successful. Admittedly, temporalists could argue that they are willing to accept that God is spatial insofar as He is everywhere. They might oppose the corporeality of God only on the assumption that it entails having some sort of a finite body. Analogous to Craig's position on temporalism, they might hold that God is nonspatial prior to the creation of the universe and after the creation He is omnipresent in all times and spatial locations.

Although I reject the scientific view that science is the ultimate criterion of what is and what features things have, I am reluctant to adopt a metaphysical or theological position that requires a special interpretation of science designed to allow us to hang on to our intuitive attachments and faith commitments. If theism were to require views about space and time contrary to our best physical theories as judged by physicists, this would provide evidence against theism. If a nonspatial being cannot be in spacetime, there is no time for God. Someday physicists might develop theories of time according to which an absolute time emerges from particle interaction. For now, there is near consensus that differentiation of time and space is relative to inertial frame, and, thus, on the behavior of bodies in motion. Our theology should not require a particular kind of physical

²² WILLIAM LANE CRAIG, *God, Time, and Eternity*, Dordrecht 2001; IDEM., *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*, Dordrecht 2001; IDEM. / QUENTIN SMITH (ed.), *Einstein, Relativity, and Absolute Simultaneity* (Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy), London-New York 2008; ROBERT B. STEWART (ed.), *God and Cosmology: William Lane Craig and Sean Carroll in Dialogue*, Minneapolis 2016.

²³ CRAIG / SMITH, Introduction, in: IDEM. (ed.), *Einstein, Relativity, and Absolute Simultaneity*, 1-9, 8.

²⁴ Some of the difficulties for the neo-Lorentzian position are reviewed in DOMINIC LINFORD, *Neo-Lorentzian Relativity and the Beginning of the Universe*, in: *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 11 (2021) 1-38.

theory about time and space that makes one inertial frame absolute contrary to findings that there is no empirical evidence to back this up. Craig would dispute what the empirical evidence supports; and I admit that he would not be alone in this. Nevertheless, attempts to salvage absolute time are widely dismissed by physicists.

One strategy for temporalists who agree to take a hands-off policy on physics is to introduce a metaphysical conception of time that is immune from whatever doubts might be raised by features of spacetime. On this view, God does not need to be in spacetime to be in metaphysical time. Metaphysical time is absolute.²⁵ Metaphysical time does not require relativity or coordination with physical theory.

An initial worry that appeals to metaphysical time raises is this. We are embodied creatures who occupy spacetime. The problems that motivate temporalism involve the need for relations with God that develop in time. If our time is the one described by physics and God's time is the one described by some metaphysical theory, we will not be able to use time as the medium through which our personal relationship with God occurs. Ryan Mullins has proposed a solution to this problem: metaphysical time contains physical time. Our time is grounded in God's time. »Physical time's existence and structure are completely dependent on metaphysical time.«²⁶ Moments of our time align in a one-to-one correspondence with moments of metaphysical time; and although metaphysical time does not come with the same measure of intervals we have in spacetime, the »now« of physical time is simultaneous with God's »now« in metaphysical time. The problem here is that present moments for creatures in different inertial frames in this world do not correspond to one another. So, to make the now of metaphysical time match up with a unique now in physical time, we would need to have a preferred absolute inertial frame. If we had this unique present in physical time, however, a metaphysical time would appear to be superfluous. In response, temporalists might insist that metaphysical time allows there to be time prior to the creation of the universe.

Although Craig has devoted most of his energies on this topic to offering his neo-Lorentzian interpretation of physical time, he also suggests a Kantian interpretation of time as the form of inner intuition: »[...] we have powerful metaphysical grounds for believing that time can exist independently of space [...]. Kant's insight that time is a form applicable not only to the external world, but to consciousness as well.«²⁷ However, according to Kant, time is only the form of inner intuition for *human* consciousness, and not for divine consciousness. Kant considered being temporal beneath God's dignity and held that temporal succession in divine consciousness is unthinkable.²⁸ Humans view the world as temporal, according to Kant, because of the limitations of human consciousness. Kant does not show us that something can have temporal existence without any spatial location; rather, he considers it to be fundamental features of the nature of human cognition to represent the passage of our thoughts as temporal and to represent things perceived by the outward senses as spatially related, while divine knowledge has no need for forms of intuition. Perhaps the most plausible way to justify the projection of the human forms of intuition onto divine consciousness would be through a form of (non-atheistic) religious fictionalism. While religious fictionalism is currently being formulated in various ways, I understand it as a view about religious language, that religious claims may be treated *as if* true, because of their symbolic nature or because they function metaphorically, even if they are not to be understood as literally true. God is not

²⁵ For an introduction to and defense of metaphysical time coupled with presentist temporalism, see RYAN T. MULLINS, *The End of the Timeless God*, Oxford 2016.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ WILLIAM LANE CRAIG, *The metaphysics of special relativity: three views*, in: IDEM. / SMITH (ed.), *Einstein, Relativity, and Absolute Simultaneity*, 11-49, 40.

²⁸ IMMANUEL KANT, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Band VI, Berlin 1914, 50n.

a corporeal person to sit on a throne, but we may affirm that it is figuratively true that God sits on His throne when this is understood as symbolic for divine sovereignty. If there were a need for a metaphysical space in which to locate heaven and hell and the divine throne, it would be a fictional or mythic space, that is to say, we use the language of place and location to figuratively express religious truths. There is no more need for a real metaphysical time for God than there is a need for a real metaphysical space. As for the Kantian approach, God is not in spacetime, and does not have outer and inner senses whose forms of intuition are space and time, respectively. We can imagine a metaphysical time for God that is generated by a divine now; and fancifully imagine God having divine thoughts passing in metaphysical time, considered as the form of His inner intuition.²⁹ Likewise, Avicenna suggested that religious language makes use of symbols and allegories as an aid to the imagination for those unable to achieve an intellectual grasp of religious truth.³⁰

Scriptural Temporalism

Finally, one may object to atemporalism on scriptural grounds, as does Mullins in some detail. Mullins points out that the literal meanings of the scriptural proof texts used by atemporalists attribute temporal duration to God, although not on the scale of human temporal measures. An example of this in the Noble Qur'ān is the following: »And indeed, a day with your Lord is like a thousand years of those you count.« (22:47) Mullins interprets this to mean that God is in metaphysical time while we are in physical time, and that durations are not measured in the same way in both. Mullins further criticizes the Church Fathers and others who interpreted similar Biblical passages to mean that God is timeless.³¹ Regardless of the issue of Biblical exegesis, by the time we reach late antiquity, there was sufficient precedent for interpreting such passages as indications of divine atemporality, rather than of a special metaphysical time with its own measure. So, the Qur'ān is revealed in a context where atemporality would have been understood, and this is confirmed by the dominant views in the early *tafsīrs*. Caution against literal interpretations of temporal durations should be observed for heavenly creatures as well: »The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a day the extent of which is fifty thousand years.« (70:4) In historical context, we are to understand this as meaning that the ascent to God is not temporal; and not to puzzle over why a day with God is just a thousand years while for the angels it is fifty thousand. The language here is figurative.

Conclusion

In a series of publications, Katherine Dormandy has defended a moderate form of religious evidentialism.³² Her evidentialism is not one that restricts evidence to scientific data,

²⁹ I argue against doing so in LEGENHAUSEN, Does God Have a Mind?

³⁰ AVICENNA, The Metaphysics of the Healing, Provo 2005, Book Ten, Chapter Two, 366.

³¹ MULLINS, The End of the Timeless God, 116-118. For criticism of Mullins view of Augustine and his contention that temporal presentism was central to classical theism, see PAUL HELM, Review: R.T. Mullins. The End of the Timeless God, in: Journal of Analytic Theology 5 (2017) 915-918.

³² KATHERINE DORMANDY, Rational Faith: How Faith Construed as Trust Does, and Does Not, Go Beyond Our Evidence, in: The Monist 106 (2023) 72-82; IDEM., True Faith: Against Doxastic Partiality about Faith (in God and Religious Communities) and in Defence of Evidentialism, in: Australian Philosophical Review 5 (2021) 4-28; IDEM., Evidence-Seeking as an Expression of Faith, in: American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 92 (2018) 409-428. As Dormandy understands »evidentialism«, it does not imply the questionable contentions that practical reasons are irrelevant to belief justification nor that justification will always supervene on the available evidence.

impartial evidence, but it demands respect for science. Her concern is that faith should not be a license to allow us to wander away from where evidence leads. We should not gerrymander scientific data to fit our religious doctrines. Temporalists may succeed in showing how absolute time can be posited in a manner consistent with the empirical data, but it ignores the theoretical advantages that have led physicists to embrace relativity. As science advances, new evidence may be found for an absolutist view of time in a way that may allow for a rejection of divine timelessness; but at present, physicists remain committed to spacetime with relative simultaneity. Avicenna held a classical form of theism that required God to be atemporal because the science of his day made time dependent on motion. Contemporary physics also suggests that what is in time must also be in space, or spacetime. Although pantheists might hold that God is located at every point in spacetime, Avicenna suggests that God is neither outside the world nor inside it; but that it would be too much to require people to believe this. I have suggested that we may imagine God as being in time with us, but we should understand this to involve a figurative use of language, a kind of fictionalism from which we should refrain in our philosophical theology. Absolute time requires the selection of a preferred inertial frame, a frame defined by laws of motion. To bind God to such a frame would be viewed by Kant as beneath the dignity of the deity; to free God from physical time by putting Him into a metaphysical time would require the sort of faith against which Dormandy warns us, one that fails to adequately respect the impartial evidence.