

“Timelessness out of Mind: On the Alleged Incoherence of Divine Timelessness”

Edward Wierenga

University of Rochester

Recent objections to the doctrine of divine timelessness have appealed either to the claim that continued omniscience requires existence in time or to the claim that divine action is only possible if God is located in time. The former claim has been fairly thoroughly investigated and, it seems to me, must be judged inconclusive. The latter claim has not received the same detailed attention. In a recent article and book, however, Richard Swinburne has developed the objection with characteristic attention to the underlying metaphysical issues. Swinburne's approach is to propose and defend some principle about the nature of time and causation. He then applies these principles to divine timelessness and claims that the concept is "incoherent". I argue that Swinburne's principles are not as plausible as he thinks and that, in any event, it is unclear that they have the consequences for the doctrine of divine timelessness that he thinks they have.

According to an ancient strand in Christian thought, God has a unique perspective on all of history: he sees everything that ever happens all at once. Here is one statement of that idea:

When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things always were, and perpetually remain, under his eyes, so that to his knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present. And they are present in such a way that he not only conceives them through ideas, as we have before us those things which our minds remember, but he truly looks upon them and discerns them as things placed before him. And this foreknowledge is extended throughout the universe to every creature.⁽¹⁾

This passage is from John Calvin, who is perhaps less well-known for attributing this perspective to God than are his more prominent predecessors, Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas. In this tradition, God's unique perspective is taken as a key component of his special *mode of existence*, eternity or timelessness. In Boethius' famous phrase, "eternity...is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."⁽²⁾

The opposing view is that God is not eternal, but *everlasting*; he is not timeless, but *in time*. In recent years it seems to have reached the status of a new orthodoxy among philosophers of religion.⁽³⁾ Nevertheless, I am not persuaded that the objections in the literature to the doctrine of divine timelessness or the reasons in favor of divine temporality are especially convincing. In fact, the main considerations advanced *in favor* of divine temporality, it seems to me, are *objections* to divine eternity. The latter fall into two categories. The first appeals to claims about required changes in what God knows. The second appeals to claims about divine action in the world.

I. Knowledge, Change, and Indexicals

The first objection to divine eternity notes that what we know changes as time goes by. As things change, we acquire new knowledge, and some of the things we believed become false, so they would no longer count as knowledge if we persisted in believing them. Now if God is omniscient, he knows everything that

we know. More precisely, what any of us knows at a given time must be a (proper) subset of what God knows at that time. Since some of the things we know to be true at certain times we know to be false at other times, what God knows must similarly vary over time; and that could not happen if he were outside of time.⁽⁴⁾

This informal statement of the argument covers up some substantive and typically undefended assumptions.⁽⁵⁾ One is that in at least some cases when what we know changes, when we add to what we know, some propositions we formerly knew become false. How could it be otherwise? After all, the set of propositions I knew yesterday included the proposition I then expressed by

(1) It is sunny today,

whereas the set of propositions I know today includes the proposition I express today by

(2) It is not sunny today.⁽⁶⁾

Well, it is surely true that sentences like these containing temporally indexical elements such as tenses or terms like 'now' or 'yesterday' can express true propositions on some occasions of use and false ones on other occasions. But what is not obvious—at least not to me—is that such sentences as (1) and (2) express propositions that themselves vary in truth value over time. For all I can tell, (1) expressed a certain true proposition yesterday and if used today it would express a *different* false proposition. Perhaps the truth that (1) expressed yesterday is still true. In that case, the union of the set of propositions I knew yesterday and the set of propositions I know today is consistent, and perhaps, also, God knows them all from an atemporal perspective.⁽⁷⁾

Of course, it is one thing to make this logical point, and it is another thing to give a plausible account of the objects of our knowledge and belief according to which temporal indexicals do function in this way. It is well known, for example, that the proposition that (1) expressed yesterday is not the same as the proposition expressed by

(3) It is, was, or will be sunny on March 2, 1999,

for I could have known yesterday the proposition then expressed by (1) without knowing the date. More strikingly, someone could know the proposition expressed by (3) at another time without knowing what I knew yesterday when it was then *present* to me that it was then sunny.

In *The Nature of God* I defended an account according which sentences like (1) express at a given time a proposition involving the *haecceity* or individual essence of that time. On this account, we have knowledge *de praesenti* when we grasp a proposition involving the haecceity of the present time. As a matter of fact, we never grasp such propositions at other times, but there is no obstacle in principle to God grasping all such propositions. Whether that gives him knowledge *de praesenti* depends on whether he grasps them at their time or whether he grasps them at other times or from an eternal perspective. Accordingly, that God knows the propositions we know when we have knowledge *de praesenti* does not settle the question of whether he is in time or out of time. What would settle that question is whether he knows such propositions *at their times* or not—but nothing about the argument we are considering gives us an answer to that question. I concede, of course, that the idea that moments of time each have their own individual essences is a little hard to believe. But I think that this account is technically adequate. And it nevertheless remains the case that someone who wants to use the argument from temporal indexicals against God's eternity needs to provide an alternative account of the objects of our temporal knowledge and belief.

It might seem obvious that there is a readily available alternative account. It is the claim that many propositions are *perspectival*.⁽⁸⁾ A proposition can be true at one time and false at another. More generally, a proposition can be true at one *index*, consisting of a person and a time (and perhaps a place and a world) and false at another. Consider the proposition

(4) I am sitting.

On the present proposal, this proposition, as it happens, is true at the index of <Wierenga, 3:00 p.m. E.S.T. on March 2, 1999>. But that very proposition, (4), is false at the index of <Wierenga, 4:30 p.m. P.S.T. on April 9, 1999>.

If propositions are thus perspectival, we should distinguish *believing that a proposition is true at an index* from *believing at an index that a proposition is true*. An example of the former is believing

(5) *I am sitting* is true at <Wierenga, 3:00 p.m. E.S.T. on March 2, 1999>.

An example of the latter is believing (4) *at the index* <Wierenga, 3:00 p.m. E.S.T. on March 2, 1999>. Anyone can have the former belief; only someone actually at the index in question can have the latter belief.⁽⁹⁾

The informal argument with which we began included the claim that if God is omniscient, he knows everything that any of us knows. That assumption ought to be challenged. Hardly anyone accepts the parallel claim for omnipotence, that if God is omnipotent he can do anything that any of us can do.⁽¹⁰⁾ Why should we accept it for omniscience? In particular, if I know (4) at the index <Wierenga, 3:00 p.m. E.S.T. on March 2, 1999>, God should not have *that* knowledge, that is, he should not know (4) *at that index*, for he could only do that by being me, which, of course, is impossible for anyone but me. So if some propositions are perspectival, a more sensible account of omniscience would be something like

(6) *x* is omniscient if and only if for any proposition *p* and perspective <*S*, *t*> (i) if *p* is true at <*S*, *t*> then *x* knows that *p* is true at <*S*, *t*>, and (ii) if *x* is at <*S*, *t*> and *p* is true at <*S*, *t*> then at <*S*, *t*> *x* knows that *p*.

On this account it will follow that an omniscient being is in time only on the assumption that it is at some temporal perspective. In particular, it will follow that *God* is not eternal, given that he is omniscient, only on the further assumption that he is at some temporal perspective. Merely noting that the knowledge of those of us who are in time changes as time goes by does not establish anything about God's perspective or mode of existence. Moreover, if we could show that God is at some temporal perspective, it would follow straightaway that he is in time, without any excursus through omniscience.

I conclude that the attempt to argue against divine timelessness by appeal to the claim that our knowledge changes over time is unpersuasive. The issues are clear, it seems to me: what needs to be added to the argument is a convincing account of the objects of knowledge and belief, one according to which God's own knowledge changes over time.

II. Divine Action and Temporality

The second kind of objection to divine eternity appeals to God's activity. It holds that if God is an agent, if he creates or redeems, for example, then he performs actions which occur in time, and that is something he could not do if he were timeless.

Aquinas has a reply to this objection. He holds that God's action in eternity could have effects that occur in time:

Nor, if the action of the first agent is eternal, does it follow that His effect is eternal.... Now, an effect follows from the intellect and the will according to the determination of the intellect and the command of the will. Moreover, just as the intellect determines every other condition of the thing made, so does it prescribe the time of its making, for art determines not only that this thing is to be such and such, but that it is to be at this particular time, even as a physician determines that a dose of medicine is to be drunk at such and such a particular time, so that, if his act of will were of itself sufficient to produce the effect, the effect

would follow anew from his previous decision, without any new action on his part. Nothing, therefore, prevents our saying that God's action existed from all eternity, whereas its effect was not present from eternity, but existed at that time when, from all eternity, He ordained it.⁽¹¹⁾

Critics have not been content with this view. Wolterstorff claims, for example, that "in the case of certain of God's actions the temporality of the event that God acts on infects his own action with temporality."⁽¹²⁾ Ironically, however, the actions Wolterstorff cites in support of this claim are God's acts of knowing what we express by tensed sentences. God "knows what is happening in our history, what has happened, and what will happen. Hence, some of God's actions are themselves temporal events."⁽¹³⁾ So this development of the argument from divine action just appeals once more the argument from omniscience, which I have already claimed to be inconclusive. Another critic of Aquinas' perspective is Stephen Davis. His primary complaint is that it requires that we have a "usable concept" of atemporal causation, which he thinks we do not.⁽¹⁴⁾ What more is required? Is it somehow deficient or mistaken to hold with Aquinas that God's eternal action has as effects various events that occur in time? Exactly what is wrong with that suggestion? Without taking the time to survey other recent attempts to object to divine eternal action, let me merely record my impression that they tend to assert that *something* is wrong with this picture, without saying precisely what it is.

In this context, Richard Swinburne's recent work on God and time⁽¹⁵⁾ can be seen as an attempt to add the missing details, to show from principles about the nature of causation and time that no agent can be eternal. I turn then, in the remainder of this paper, to examine Swinburne's claims.

III. Swinburne's Principles about Time

In a characteristically principled way Richard Swinburne attempts first to uncover some fundamental or metaphysical principles about time before applying them to the problem of the relation of God and time.⁽¹⁶⁾ In fact, Swinburne presents and defends four such principles. Two of them, however, are introduced as part of an effort to make Swinburne's preferred view that God is in time palatable, despite having the consequence that God is "time's prisoner", or, as I shall put it, that time waits for no one, not even God. So I shall not discuss those principles. The remaining two he brings to bear on the doctrine of divine timelessness, claiming that they can show that "the 'timeless' view is incoherent."⁽¹⁷⁾

Swinburne states his first principle as follows: "everything that happens, every event, that is-including the mere existence of a substance with its properties-happens over a period of time and never at an instant of time, or is analyzable in terms of things happening over periods of time."⁽¹⁸⁾ Swinburne then claims that "the most natural reading of the tradition [that God exists at a single "moment"] seems to me to read 'moment' as 'instant', and in that case the doctrine is in conflict with the first principle..... A state of affairs must last for a period of time; it cannot occur at an instant. God cannot be omnipotent or omniscient just at an instant."⁽¹⁹⁾

To evaluate this objection, we will need to look more closely at both the principle in question and the way by which Swinburne attempts to derive a conflict between the principle and the doctrine of divine timelessness. For the principle to apply to a *state of affairs*, such as God's being omniscient, it must be stated in a way that applies not merely to *events* or to *what happens*, despite Swinburne's summarizing it as "First Principle: Events Happen at Periods."⁽²⁰⁾ And, indeed, in his defense of it, it is clear that Swinburne intends something more general. For, immediately after formulating the principle in the way I quoted it above, Swinburne goes on to defend a slightly different thesis:

In general, our ascription of properties to objects is ascription to them over periods of time-things are green or wet or weigh 10 lb. for periods of time. And normally when we do ascribe properties to objects at instants, our doing so is to be read as ascribing them to objects for periods which include the instant. To say that the object is green at 2 p.m. is to say that it is green for some period which includes 2 p.m.

This suggests that the thesis Swinburne intends as his first principle can be expressed as:

(P₁) For every object x , property P , and interval or instant t , if x has P throughout or at t , then t is an interval.⁽²¹⁾

In other words, if a thing ever has a property, then it has it for an interval of time.

It would be tempting to put Swinburne's thesis as the claim that nothing ever has a property for merely an instant, but that would not be what he means. For he quite literally asserts that things do not possess properties *at* instants at all. An apparent attribution of *being green* to an object at an instant t is to be understood or analyzed as the attribution of *being green* to the object throughout an arbitrary interval that contains t . A thing can be green throughout a period of time, but not at an instant. Similarly, to cite another example Swinburne develops at some length, moving objects do not literally possess an instantaneous velocity at an instant. Rather, instantaneous velocity at an instant t is to be understood as the limit of the average velocity over intervals that end or begin at t . More precisely, an object has an instantaneous velocity of 10 ft./sec. at 2:00 p.m. if and only if

$\lim_{s \rightarrow t_2} \frac{s_2 - s}{t_2 - t_1} = 10$, for $t < t_2$ and $\lim_{s \rightarrow t_2} \frac{s_2 - s}{t_2 - t_1} = 10$, for $t > t_2$, where $t_2 = 2:00$ p.m., s_2 is the distance in feet covered by the object at t_2 since some arbitrary origin, s is the distance in feet covered at t since the origin, and time is measured in seconds.⁽²²⁾

I find Swinburne's defense of (P₁) to be unconvincing. For one thing, even if it cannot happen that an object is, say, green, for *merely* an instant, I do not see why it could not be green for every instant included in any interval during which it is green. But, in the second place, from the fact that some apparent attributions of a property at an instant can be translated into talk of property possession over intervals, it does not follow that all such ascriptions can be similarly paraphrased away. Indeed, Swinburne's own example of instantaneous velocity seems to provide the ingredients of a counterexample.

Consider Swinburne's moving object during the time around 2:00 p.m. when it is in motion. Since it is in motion, at each instant it is in a different location. Thus, for some place P and instant t , *being wholly at P* is a property the object has just at t . Moreover, it does not seem possible to reduce talk of being at a place at an instant in favor of some circumlocution about occupying a bigger region throughout an interval of time, for the object never fully occupies any region larger than it is itself. It never fully occupies the *path* that it travels, for example, but only a part of that path at each instant it is in motion. Furthermore, we can now see why Swinburne's example of the reduction of instantaneous velocity to the limits of average velocities over intervals not only suggests this objection but seems committed to it. The average velocities to which Swinburne appeals are the ratios of distance traveled to intervals of times. But what is the distance traveled by an object if not the length of the path it took from *the position it occupied* at the beginning of the interval to *the position it occupied* at the end of the interval? So it looks as though some properties can be had by objects only for an instant.

I just claimed that it does not seem possible to reduce talk of being at a place at an instant in favor of some circumlocution; Swinburne thinks otherwise. He suggests (in correspondence) that "the analysis (for the object in motion) consists in more and more of it lying within the region as we approach the instant from beforehand, and less and less of it lying within the region as we get further away from [it]."⁽²³⁾ Suppose our moving object is a cup, and let R be the cup-sized region that, as I see it, the cup occupies at some instant t . Swinburne's proposal, then, is that the claim that the cup has the property of *being located at R* at t can be analyzed in terms of the cup's properties throughout intervals of time surrounding t . More precisely, at the instants before t , the closer they are to t , the greater is the proportion of the cup that is then within or overlapping R . And at the instants after t , the later they are after t , the less is the proportion of the cup that is then within or overlapping R . But I do not see how this eliminates all reference to possession of properties *at instants*. For how could the proposed analysis be understood without involving some such claims as the following? There are instants t_1 and t_2 earlier than t such that t_2 is closer to t than t_1 and which are such that a greater part of the cup is within R at t_2 than is within R at t_1 . But then it looks like the cup

will have such properties as *being 50% within R* or *being 75% within R* at instants. So the proposed analysis seems to require that the cup have at least some properties at instants and thus provides no support for the claim that such reference can always be analyzed away.

So far I have been arguing against Swinburne's principle

(P₁) For every object *x*, property *P*, and interval or instant *t*, if *x* has *P* throughout or at *t*, then *t* is an interval.

Now it is time to ask how he derives

- God is not eternal

from it. Well, strictly, what Swinburne deduces is

- God is not omniscient for just an instant.

Now (8) follows from (P₁) with the help of

- There is an interval or instant *t* such that God is omniscient at *t*,

from which it follows that God is omniscient throughout an interval, and hence, not at an instant. And, of course, if God is omniscient throughout an interval of time, then he is *in* time and thus not eternal.

I think that the defender of divine eternity has two replies to this argument. The first is to deny premiss (9): God is omniscient *in eternity* and not in time; so there is no interval of time nor instant of time such that, strictly speaking, God is omniscient *then*. The second is to note that (7) does not follow from (8). There are three categories: instants of time, intervals of time, and eternity.⁽²⁴⁾ The first two are kinds of time; the third is instead a "mode of existence" which includes a certain perspective on time. That God is not omniscient either for just an instant of time or for a temporal interval leaves it entirely open that he is omniscient in eternity. I see no way of making Swinburne's first objection more compelling.

Swinburne's remaining argument appeals to what he calls a "causal theory of time." According to Swinburne, "a period of time is future if it is logically possible that an agent can now causally affect what happens then; and a period of time is past if it is logically possible that an agent acting then could have causally affected what happens now."⁽²⁵⁾ Swinburne explicitly puts his claims here by reference to what we are able to think, that is, by reference to our conceptual scheme. For example, he says that "the concepts of past and future cannot be connected to the rest of our conceptual scheme unless we understand the past as the logically contingent that is causally affectible. Unless we suppose that, any grasp we might have on the concepts would be utterly mysterious and irrelevant to anything else."⁽²⁶⁾ My own jaundiced reaction to such a "Kantian" claim about, as we might put it, a "necessary precondition" of our experience of the passage of time is to embrace the skepticism it invites, to wonder what time is really like apart from our experience of it. Fortunately, we can avoid both the complexities of conceptual schemes and their relation to the world as well as the difficult project of filling in the details of Swinburne's principle, for his objection to divine timelessness appeals not to the principle itself, but to some claims he makes in support of it. Swinburne writes that the doctrine of divine timelessness "remains open to a conclusive objection from principle 3 [the causal theory of time]: if God causes the beginning or continuing existence of the world, and perhaps interferes in its operation from time to time, his acting must be prior to the effects that his action causes."⁽²⁷⁾ Since the causal theory of time does not explicitly say that causes must precede their effects, we should look at Swinburne's reasons for that claim.

Those reasons are included in the following paragraph:

Causation in a circle is not logically possible. If A causes B, B cannot cause A (or cause anything which by a longer circle causes A). For what causes what is logically contingent-'anything can produce anything', wrote Hume. Let us put the point in this way: a sufficiently powerful being could, it is logically possible, alter the laws of nature in such a way that some event had, instead of its normal effect at a certain time, one incompatible with that normal effect. So if causation in a circle were logically possible and A caused B and B caused A, a sufficiently powerful being at the moment of B's occurrence could have altered the laws of nature so that B caused not-A; in which case A would have (indirectly) caused A not to occur--which is absurd. So since manifestly the future is causally affectible, the past is not. It follows that backward causation is impossible--causes cannot be later than their effects. It follows too that simultaneous causation is impossible. For if simultaneous causation were possible and A caused B simultaneously, and B caused C simultaneously, then, by Hume's principle cited earlier, it would be logically possible that B could have had, instead of its normal effect, not-A. That logically impossible conjunction of casual sequences is, given Hume's principle, only rendered impossible if we suppose simultaneous causation itself to be impossible. Hence, given that causes and effects are events, which last for periods of time, any effect (which has a beginning) must begin at an instant later than its cause begins; and any effect (which has an end) must end at an instant later than its cause ends.⁽²⁸⁾ So Swinburne gives two applications of what he calls Hume's principle, one for the conclusion that causes cannot be later than their effects, and the other for the conclusion that causes cannot be simultaneous with their effects. That leaves only the remaining possibility, that causes *precede* their effects. At this level of exposition, it seems clear that there are two ways for the defender of divine timelessness to escape the objection. The first is to note that, as Swinburne himself indicates, his argument presupposes that causes are *events*, and, thus, whatever it establishes applies only to event-causation. But God is an *agent*-cause, and agents-in contrast to their actions-are neither before nor after the effects they cause. I myself am sympathetic to this reply, but since the medieval defenders of divine eternity sometimes speak of God's eternal "action" or of God as "pure act", I shall not insist upon it. The second obvious reply is to note that Swinburne's assumption that there are just three possibilities for the relation of a cause to its effect--prior to, simultaneous with, and later than--ignores an important alternative, namely, that a cause is *eternal* while its effect is *temporal*. Just as in his first objection, Swinburne assumes that if God is omniscient that is *in time*, either at an instant or throughout a temporal duration--without admitting the alternative that God is eternally omniscient--so in this case, too, he assumes that the only way a cause can be related to its effect is *temporally*. Both assumptions thus fail to take seriously the idea of eternity as a distinct mode of existence. I am sympathetic to this second reply, as well. Nevertheless, I propose in the remainder of this paper to examine more closely Swinburne's argument that a cause cannot be simultaneous with its effect (and by unstated extension, his parallel argument that a cause must precede its effect).

Hume's principle, in unrestricted form, is the claim that anything can cause anything, more formally,

(10) For any events A and B, (A causes B).

I say that this is the principle in "unrestricted" form, since surely some restrictions ought to be placed on it, if it is to have a chance of being true. For one thing, presumably no event can cause itself, so no instance of (10) instantiated onto a single event is true. Thus, at the very least, (10) should be revised to:

(10') For any events A and B such that AB, (A causes B).

As we saw, Swinburne holds that "if simultaneous causation were possible and A caused B simultaneously, and B caused C simultaneously, then, by Hume's principle cited earlier, it would be logically possible that B could have had, instead of its normal effect, not-A." Thus he seems to deduce from (10') both

- (A causes B)
- (B causes not-A)

and then concludes from them that

- (A causes B & B causes not-A).

Swinburne then reasons that this "logically impossible conjunction of casual sequences is, given Hume's principle, only rendered impossible if we suppose simultaneous causation itself to be impossible." But surely there is a simpler and more obvious way to block (13); it is to note that it fails to follow from (11) and (12). Possibility is not closed under conjunction.⁽²⁹⁾ This is a point that should be insisted upon, apart from issues of temporal priority in causation. For another instance of "Hume's principle" is the pair

(11) (A causes B), and

- (A causes not-B).

But we should not be tempted to infer

- (A causes B and A causes not-B),

and, indeed, we can see this without raising the question of the temporal relation between the events in question.

In conclusion, I have looked two recent proposals of Richard Swinburne, construed as attempts to fill in the details of the objection to divine eternity from facts about divine agency. I have argued that these attempts do not succeed. I conclude, therefore, that it is premature to put divine timelessness out of mind.⁽³⁰⁾

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 20, 5.

2. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V, Prose 6. For a recent sympathetic discussion see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-458.

3. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*, ed. C. Orlebeke and L. Smedes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), reprinted in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. S. Cahn and D. Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) pp. 77-89, and Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), esp. chs. 1-2.

4. An influential version of this argument was presented by Norman Kretzmann in "Omniscience and Immutability," *Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1966): 409-421. It was earlier defended by Franz Brentano, *Philosophische Untersuchungen zu Raum, Zeit, und Kontinuum*, ed. Stephan Korner and Roderick M. Chisholm (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1976), p. 105. More recent defenders, in addition to Wolterstorff and Davis, include Arthur Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience," *Philosophy* 37 (1962): 114-129, Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), and Patrick Grim, "Against Omniscience: The Case from Essential Indexicals," *Noûs* 19 (1985): 151-180. Critics include Hector-Neri Castañeda, "Omniscience and Indexical Reference," *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967): 203-210, Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), and Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-458.

5. I have argued in some detail against versions of this argument elsewhere. See Edward Wierenga, "Omniscience and Knowledge *De Se et De Praesenti*," in D.F. Austin, ed., *Philosophical Analysis: A Defense by Example* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1988): 251-258, and *The Nature of God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 6. Here I want merely to sketch two alternative lines of criticism.

6. I write this during a blizzard in Rochester, New York, in March!

7. Cf. Aquinas: "Words denoting different times are applied to God, because His eternity

includes all times, and not as if He Himself were altered through present, past and future," *S.T.* I, 10, 2 *ad.* 4.

8. I borrow this term from Ernest Sosa, "Consciousness of the Self and of the Present," in J. Tomberlin, ed., *Agent, Language, and the Structure of the World* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983): 131-143. The account I present derives from David Kaplan, "Demonstratives" (with "Afterthoughts") in Joseph Almog, John Perry, Howard Wettstein, eds., *Themes from Kaplan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 481-613; with an assist from Richard Feldman, "On Saying Different Things," *Philosophical Studies* 38 (1980): 79-84.

9. This account has a nice application to the problem of first-person reference or of *de se* belief that has been prominent in the literature. If I am sitting at 3:00 p.m. on March 2, 1999, am aware that I am sitting, but suffer from amnesia or don't know what day it is, I will not then believe (5). Nevertheless I do believe (4) at the index <Wierenga, 3:00 p.m. E.S.T. on March 2, 1999>.

10. The exceptions include Descartes and Earl Conee. For the latter, see "The Possibility of Power beyond Possibility," *Philosophical Perspectives*, V, James Tomberlin, ed. (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 447-473.

11. *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, 35, 3.

12. Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," p. 93.

13. *Ibid.*

14. I am here simplifying Davis' objection. See his *Logic and the Nature of God*, ch. 1. I have discussed his claims in greater detail in *The Nature of God*, pp. 196-198.

15. Richard Swinburne, "God and Time," in Eleonore Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 204-222, and *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

16. In "God and Time" this is the explicit order of presentation. In *The Christian God* the discussion of time is found in ch. 4 in Part I (on metaphysics), whereas the application of this topic to God is found in ch. 6 of Part II (on theology).

17. *The Christian God*, p. 139. Cf. "God and Time," p. 206.

18. *The Christian God*, p. 72. The parallel formulation in "God and Time" is somewhat less helpful to Swinburne's cause. There he writes that "everything that happens *in time* [emphasis added] happens over a period of time and never at an instant of time—everything, that is, apart from anything analyzable in terms of things happening over periods of times" (p. 206). The inclusion of "in time" makes it uncertain that the principle can really be applied, as Swinburne intends, to God's being omnipotent (p.216) without *assuming* that God is in time.

19. *The Christian God*, p. 139. Cf. "God and Time," p. 216. Swinburne concedes that the objection does not succeed if eternity is not an instant. But he holds that his second objection, to be discussed below, succeeds in any case. As the objection is presented, it might not be clear that it is a version of the argument from divine *action*, and, indeed, it is somewhat more general. But Swinburne could just as well have used *God's creating the world* instead of *God's being omniscient* as his example. And given that his first principle is supposed to apply to actions, he is committed to holding that actions cannot occur at just an instant.

20. *The Christian God*, p. 73.

21. I ignore the task of extending (P₁) to sequences of individuals and *n*-adic relations.
22. *The Christian God*, p. 73.
23. Richard Swinburne, personal communication, August 23, 1999.
24. Swinburne (in correspondence) denies that there are three such alternatives. He notes that Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann in their classic paper, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-458, consider just two ways of understanding eternity, namely, as instantaneous or as extended. Their terms are "of infinite duration" and "illimitable in the way in which a point or an instant may be said to be illimitable." (See p. 432.) They are thus asking about possible understandings of eternity, conceived, nevertheless, as an *alternative* both to the *temporally* extended and the *temporally* instantaneous.
25. *The Christian God*, p. 81; cf. "God and Time," p. 211.
26. *The Christian God*, pp. 85-86; cf. "God and Time," p. 214.
27. "God and Time," p. 216; cf. *The Christian God*, pp. 139-140. Swinburne adds (in both places), "Similarly, his [God's] awareness of events in the world must be later than those events." I shall ignore this last contention, however, since the suggestion that God's awareness of events in time is due to their affecting him causally is contrary to classical Christian thought and raises, in addition, the exceedingly difficult issue of the source of God's knowledge.
28. *The Christian God*, p. 82; cf. "God and Time," pp. 212, 214.
29. Swinburne, of course, knows that possibility is not closed under conjunction. In correspondence he claims that I have misinterpreted his argument. It should be taken instead as arguing from (11') A causes B, and (12') $\sim((A \text{ causes } B) \text{ and } (B \text{ causes not-}A))$, to (13') $\sim(B \text{ causes } C)$, where C is simultaneous with A. But this inference is invalid, too. So we still are not required to prohibit simultaneous causation in order to prevent Hume's principle from leading to a contradiction.
30. I am grateful to the editors of this volume and to the organizers of the 1999 Pacific Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers for encouraging me to present this paper at that conference and to the participants who offered helpful suggestions. I am also indebted to Greg Gannsle and, especially, to Richard Swinburne for their written comments on an earlier draft. Despite that fact that I persist in disagreeing with him over some points, trying to address his comments resulted in, what I take to be, numerous improvements in the paper.