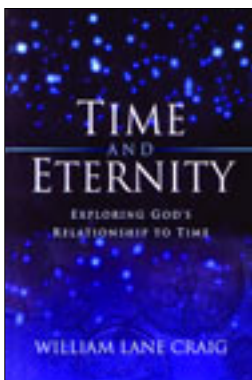


IS GOD ALWAYS IN TIME?

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

*William Lane Craig recently debated UNSW philosopher, Peter Slezak, in the Sydney Town Hall. The topic of that debate was 'Atheism vs Christianity: where does the evidence point?' Craig is Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology and president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society. He has written extensively on apologetics, divine foreknowledge, and the philosophy of time. This interview was conducted in Cambridge after the release of his new book, **Time and Eternity: exploring God's relationship to time.***



Bill, you have been working in the field of philosophy and apologetics for a few decades. Have the questions in apologetics changed during your time?

There has been a shift towards increasing relativism and pluralism, but it hasn't affected my approach. I still stick with an appeal to the objectivity of standards of rationality, truth and logic. If we surrender those, we shoot ourselves in the foot and will commit suicide by the next generation. But I do think the challenges have changed.

How do students respond to your 'rational' approach? Does it meet with postmodern resistance?

Frankly, I don't confront many students who are postmodernists. For all the faddish talk, I think it's a myth. Students aren't generally relativistic and pluralistic, except when it comes to ethics and religion. But that's not postmodernism, that's *modernism*. That's old-style verificationism, which says things that are verifiable through the five senses are factual, but everything else is just a matter of taste (including ethics and religion). I think it's a deceit of our age to say that modernism is dead.

In postmodern philosophy, ethics seems to be a major current interest, along with fairly standard religious concerns such as what it means to love your neighbour.

Yes, you find the teachers returning to these ideas. Students are more relativistic than professors are, and among the professors, philosophers are the *least* relativistic—it's the opposite of what students expect. But it's demonstrated by hard statistical data. I think professors are less tolerant of relativism's cruelties than is the typical student, and they see more reasons for maintaining absolutes of some sort. Students sometimes give lip service to ideas before they have worked at understanding them.

Do you think postmodernism is largely an aesthetic choice for many students—a way of expressing freedom and other desirable values?

There is that, but I think today's student is also suffering information overload. There can be an intellectual futility when there is too much information to take on board. The easiest path to take becomes the one that says, 'There can't be any answers because I don't know how to push forward through all of this information'.

You have recently published a book on time, where you argue that God is "timeless without creation, and in time subsequent to creation". Is this view likely to cause a stir? Where will the points of resistance be?

I think the point that is counter-intuitive is that it is hard not to imagine God's timeless existence as being *before* time, but of course

it can't be—that makes no sense. But I am arguing that outside of time, God is eternal; and with creation, God has entered time.

I think there are physical analogues to this. For instance, the singularity in big bang cosmology is causally prior to the universe, and yet it is not strictly *in* time. Rather, it is the boundary of time. Similarly, I'm saying that God's eternity is causally prior, but not temporally prior, to what happens at and after creation. His eternal state is, analogously, the boundary of time.

Does this view come from your biblical understanding or your philosophy?

Well, I think there is some scriptural warrant that time had a beginning. For example, Jude 25 talks about God “before all time”, and Genesis 1:1 starts with ‘in the beginning...’ But my primary reasons are philosophical: this is the best sense I can make of God and time. While I think God is in time right now, I cannot conceive of God enduring through an infinite, empty time up until the moment of creation. I agree with Augustine and Leibniz, that time begins at the moment of creation.

How does the trinity come into this approach?

I think it is helpful, because it means God is not a lonely monad, without fellowship.

Timothy George, of Beeson Divinity School, lectured on Augustine's view of time.



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Rather, there is perfect, complete and self-fulfilled love within the triune God. This kind of relationship doesn't require events and succession, and therefore doesn't require time.

How does your thinking relate to the theological debate about the 'openness of God', that is, how affected God is by the creation?

I do think that God is now in time, and open theists agree with that. But where they take a step further is that they deny God has knowledge of the future. I have been a staunch proponent of the idea of full, attenuated divine omniscience, including full knowledge of the future. I have an appendix in *Time and Eternity* where I argue that God can have complete foreknowledge of future, contingent acts.

The Evangelical Philosophical Society seems to be thriving. What has made it so successful?

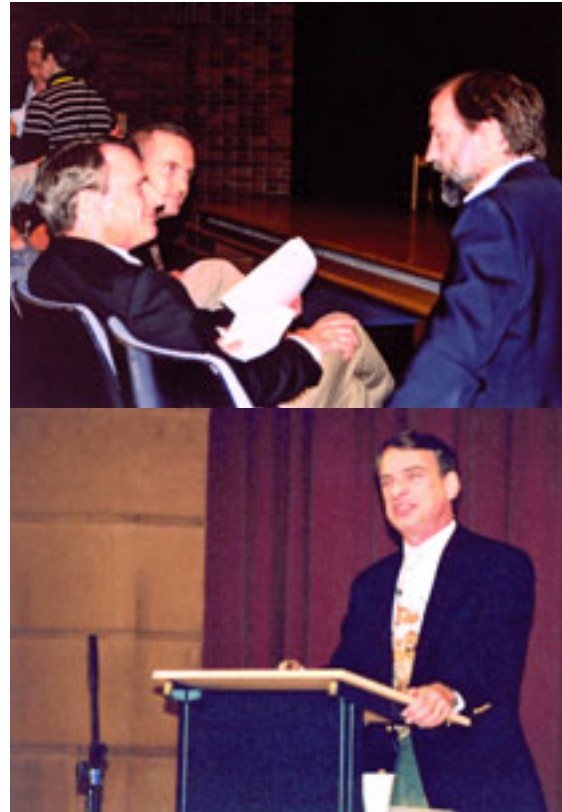
In the 1960s, Christians in Anglo-American philosophy began to come out of the closet, publish papers and join the discussion, all from the Christian standpoint. Philosophy is now one of the prime points of entry for Christians in the academy today. Many of the students cut their teeth on C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer; we are now giving them the professional philosophical training that Lewis and Schaeffer didn't have.

This doesn't fit with the view that Christians, in particular evangelicals, have abandoned the life of the mind.

Well, there have always been Christian thinkers exhorting people to use their minds and integrate their faith and thought. C.S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Carl Henry all contributed.

But here's what happened in philosophy: Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga came along in the late 60s and, honestly, I believe he will be another Leibniz in terms of his historical importance. Plantinga has almost single-handedly changed the face of Anglo-American philosophy through his brilliance, and drawn a train of brilliant philosophers with him. ©

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William Lane Craig at the Oxbridge 2002 conference.