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Time and the Nature of the Atonement

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1. Introduction

Standard practice in philosophy of religion is to evaluate certain theological positions with respect to how well they comport with desirable philosophical positions and vice versa. Objections to skeptical theism generally posit that the position requires an unacceptable level of skepticism. Compatibility with the doctrine of the resurrection is used in an attempt to break ties in the debate between dualists and materialists about human persons. And so forth.¹

In this chapter, I undertake such a discussion regarding theories of time and the nature of the atonement. One's views about the metaphysics of time can be used to help clarify one's views about the nature of atonement, and vice versa. There has been surprisingly little written about the relationship between time and atonement, and I think it time to start the conversation in earnest.² To this end, I discuss the current advantages and disadvantages presentism and eternalism have with respect to atonement theory and provide direction for future conversation.

The atonement has received quite a bit of discussion regarding its ethics—for instance, whether notable theories are indeed ethically

¹ For an introduction to the debate regarding skeptical theism, see Almeida & Oppy (2003) and Bergmann & Rea (2005). For introduction to debate about the resurrection, see Baker (2007).

² Notable exceptions are O. Crisp (2009), Lebens & Goldschmidt (2017), and Stump (2012b). For a discussion about the intersection of theories of time and the problem of evil, see Mullins (2014).

permissible.³ But along with questions about whether and how atonement is permitted, we must also inquire about the mechanics—when and how atonement might work, and for whom. Asking these questions ushers us into metaphysics. The viability of a particular account of atonement depends on what exists—both according to the account and according to our ontology—along with what atonement is to remove or change. Asking questions about when and how this change occurs invites investigation into the nature of time, identity, and persistence.

At its core, debate about the metaphysical nature of the atonement focuses on existence puzzles, along with related questions about the nature of identity and change. Someone was not reconciled, and now they are. Must a person exist for this to occur, and if so, when? Since these questions are part and parcel of philosophy of time and persistence, examination of the atonement in light of these debates—and vice versa—promises to be a fruitful endeavor.

In this chapter, I will argue that theories of time can be used to help settle or clarify one's views about the nature of the atonement, and vice versa. In order to establish this thesis, I will focus on what I call transfer and solidarity views of atonement and compare the theoretical costs and benefits of conjoining these views with presentism, on the one hand, and eternalism on the other. I will show that presentism and eternalism face different sorts of difficulties regarding both what exists and cross-time relations. These puzzles can be answered by adherents of both views; whether the solutions are regarded as theologically acceptable is another matter. In short, I will show that which theory of time one accepts affects the specifics of what one can say about the atonement and opens oneself to different objections regarding one's views on the correct theory.

The following discussion will be largely limited to presentist and eternalist theories of time. Presentism is the thesis that it is always true that there are no non-present objects or events. When quantifying over everything that exists, the only objects there are turn out to be present objects—while dinosaurs used to exist, they do not any longer. If an

³ See O. Crisp (2007 & 2008), Fee (2006), Lewis (1997), Murphy (2009), Strabbing (2016), Stump (2012b), Swinburne (1989), and Wright (2006) for a small sample of the literature.

atonement event occurred in the past, then it no longer exists. But so too, events of past sin.

Eternalism is the thesis that the objects and events from all times—past, present, and future—exist. The unrestricted quantifier ranges over objects at every time. Dinosaurs and future great-great-grandchildren exist; they are simply not present. Past and future atonement events exist, full stop. But so too, past and future events of sinning. Throughout most of the discussion, I will consider the B-theoretic version of eternalism, wherein all times are equally ontologically privileged, and there is no objective past, present, or future.⁴

I focus on presentism and eternalism because other theories of time add additional ontological complications to the discussion without offering clear ontological benefits over and above what either the presentist or eternalist can offer regarding atonement theorizing.⁵ I argue that neither presentism nor eternalism is clearly to be preferred with respect to atonement theorizing, since each view has advantages and disadvantages related to the questions and desiderata put forth below. Which theory is to be preferred depends, in large part, on what one thinks “at-one-ness” requires. Likewise, particular theories of atonement may require certain temporal ontologies. One goal of this chapter is to help the reader reach reflective equilibrium with respect to these theory choices. Decision points will be laid bare.

⁴ I will consider A-theoretic eternalism toward the end of the chapter, in the section “Eternalist A-theory to the Rescue?”

⁵ Notable theories that I ignore are the growing and shrinking block theories. According to growing block theory, only past and present objects and events exist—but given the progression of time, times that were present become past and new presents come into existence, bringing along with them new objects and events. The temporal extent of reality thus grows over time. Shrinking block is the reverse of growing block—only present and future objects and events exist, and fewer and fewer objects and events exist as future times become present and then pass out of existence. These two views appear to inherit problems from both presentist and eternalist approaches. Strategies that rely on the existence of objects and events of all times cannot be used by the growing and shrinking block theories. And these views inherit existence problems—according to growing block your sins will always exist and according to shrinking block the crucifixion no longer exists. The notable exception that may allow a growing block theorist to escape problems on both sides while retaining all advantages—hypertime—is addressed below. According to some hypertime theorists, God could retain the good objects and events (including atonement) while completely eliminating the bad. See Hudson (2010) for the beginnings of the hypertime view at work and Lebens & Goldschmidt (2017) for its application to the atonement.

2. Key Theological Assumptions

Whether the proper account of the atonement favors or makes trouble for either presentism or eternalism—or whether a theory of time rules out a particular account of atonement—will depend on what it takes to have an acceptable account of atonement itself. We must know some particulars about atonement, other than general statements such as “We are made at one with God and each other.” There appear to be many ways in which such oneness could be achieved.

In what follows, I will discuss atonement in terms of the Christian tradition. One reason for this focus, and that of the preceding literature, is due to the unique features of the Christian atonement story. The Christian account appears to require temporally exacting conditions—Christ’s suffering and death was a one-time, sufficient offering for the sins of the world.⁶ Not only is some sort of divine action for sin-remission involved, but there are explicitly temporal stakes which could be theoretically difficult. Better to engage with what appears most difficult in a ground-clearing project. Additionally, the atonement is notable for its centrality in the Christian faith, playing a distinctive role.

Though I focus on the death of Jesus, my general approach can be used by anyone who thinks that (a) there is some special moment or moments in time where forgiveness of sins happens (e.g., the Day of Atonement) and (b) special divine action is required to remit sin—that is, atoning acts themselves are not an everyday, commonplace occurrence.⁷ For those concerned with these two conditions, much of the material and concerns carry over, *mutatis mutandis*. However, to the extent one thinks the relevant special divine action can happen at multiple times, the less one may be concerned with some of the particular problems related to existence and forgiveness discussed below.

I focus on a narrower treatment of the existence, forgiveness, and removal of sin or effects of sin, all of which is of fundamental importance

⁶ See Hebrews 7:27, Hebrews 10:10, and 1 Peter 3:18.

⁷ Though the effects of said atoning acts, such as the forgiveness of sins, might be more commonplace.

to the atonement. A complete treatment would give proper attention to the scriptural idea that atonement is required for much more than just moral transgression.⁸ But moral transgression is a good place to start, especially given the historical focus on ethics, and is a way to keep the discussion manageable. For similar reasons I focus specifically on what was accomplished through Christ's suffering and death. Accounting for other aspects of the atonement magnifies the problems discussed below—if there are additional problems of purity that need to be dealt with (e.g., in the case of non-living objects), they will be subject to similar discussions regarding the existence and removal of the problem.

I assume that both God and sin exist and that, somehow, humans are made right with God despite their sin. While sin and its effects may be broad-reaching, I will further limit discussion to individual sin and its effects. For present purposes, let sin be either an event or act that assigns some property to an individual (e.g., *having sinned*) or that has continuing effects (or both). Whatever else the atonement may encompass, it (a) relevantly removes or reverses the evil of our sin⁹ (b) at least in part by Christ's sacrifice on the cross—for “Christ suffered for our sins once for all time, the just for the unjust.”¹⁰

3. Potential Roadblocks to the Debate

The widespread disagreement regarding how atonement is to be understood accounts for much of the reason why the metaphysical side of the atonement has been underexplored. Three diagnoses of the nature of the disagreement and ensuing oversight will be useful for the following discussion. First, there is disagreement about what is required for being made “at one” with another human person after more ordinary

⁸ For instance, one must make sense of the cultic practices of Israel that are repeated in the book of Hebrews regarding impurity and atonement made for places and inanimate objects. (Thanks to Carl Mosser for this point.) But what it takes to make something clean may map onto a taxonomy not dissimilar to the one I present below.

⁹ 1 John 3:5: “You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and there is no sin in him.” Biblical passages are from the NRSV translation unless otherwise specified.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 3:18a, NASB.

transgressions.¹¹ Some transgressions may be smoothed over after a simple apology. For others, it is perhaps not clear how the parties could possibly be fully reconciled at all.¹² Religious discussions of atonement add an additional layer—the relationship between humans and God has been broken, and some sort of special divine action is needed in order to make things right again. One reason for this needed divine action is that the break in the relationship is due to human sinful action, which brought about, among other things, consequences which sinners are unable themselves to remove.¹³

Given the widespread disagreement about the nature of human-to-human forgiveness, it is no surprise that disputes increase when discussing divine action. In other doctrinal disputes, one way to find common ground is to start with what is required according to a central creedal understanding of the faith. For this reason, Christian philosophers commonly return to the Apostle's or Nicene creeds. While dualists and materialists argue over whether the doctrine of the resurrection is consistent with certain metaphysical views, it is generally agreed that a proper account of the resurrection must affirm the raising of physical bodies to life. "I believe in the resurrection of the dead" cannot simply mean, "When I think about God on a bad day, my mood is improved."

This is in stark contrast to debates about the atonement. Despite its centrality, there is no universal, ecumenically accepted account of atonement or even what is required for such forgiveness of sins. I take this to be the second main reason for the metaphysical oversight—it is unclear where there is enough common ground for metaphysical theorizing to occur. Too much theoretical disagreement can make for unwieldy metaphysical discussions.

¹¹ This is one reason it will behoove us to look at several differing sorts of approaches to the atonement. In so doing, we will see important similarity in the temporal questions asked: we cannot escape them.

¹² See Rea (2019) and Strabbing (forthcoming) for discussion of the difficulties of full reconciliation.

¹³ Importantly, according to the Jewish and Christian traditions, the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation has also been broken. The breaking of the divine-human and human-creation relationships has traditionally been thought to have occurred as a result of the Fall. I will abstain from theorizing about the nature of the Fall itself for the purposes of this chapter. It has also been argued that the continued break in this relationship is not entirely due to sinful human action. See, for instance, Adams (2006) and Rea (2019).

For the Christian, the ecumenical creeds do provide some common ground: The Nicene Creed asserts, “for our salvation, [the Son] came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate,” and the Apostles’ Creed affirms that there is “the forgiveness of sins.” But little is said about how exactly (and non-metaphorically) the work of Christ accomplishes salvation and forgiveness, both in terms of *what* is done and *when* it is done. Given this, there are more theoretical questions to be answered about the atonement than in many other areas of philosophical theology.

One large point of agreement, though not universal: The crucifixion of Jesus is somehow both causally efficacious and necessary for atonement between God and human beings.¹⁴ I call this the *necessity requirement*: Something about Christ’s death on the cross itself was necessary for atonement between God and humans.¹⁵ Eleonore Stump (2018) puts the point nicely:

If Christ’s passion and death are to be efficacious as the remedy for human sin, it seems there ought to be something about the passion and death of Christ itself that is directly involved in the remedy; that is, Christ’s passion and death ought to be directly or else somehow crucially instrumental to the giving of grace in humans. (31)

There is debate regarding the necessity requirement, but Stump assumes that Christ’s passion and death are somehow necessary to atonement, and that this assumption is widely shared throughout church history.¹⁶ I join her in this assumption—especially because it is better for us to

¹⁴ Indeed, it is mentioned in both of the above creeds and explicitly linked to our salvation in the Nicene Creed, though not in terms of the necessity requirement per se. One of the reasons in support of the necessity requirement, in connection with the crucifixion, is that the Father did not “take this cup” from the Son (see Matthew 26:39). Perhaps it was not possible to do so.

¹⁵ There are varying degrees of strength one can give to the necessity requirement. One need not think this requires something like metaphysical necessity. Perhaps accidental necessity is enough. Debate about this point will take us beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹⁶ This is one of the problems with the Thomistic interpretations of the atonement, according to Stump: According to those accounts “it is not the case that a perfectly good God is unable to give grace to human beings without the passion and death of Christ” (31).

assume more stringent requirements at the outset of our discussion, and loosen them later if need be. Better to start with the harder project first.

The phrases “for our salvation” and “the forgiveness of sins” give no concrete ontological guidance. What we do know is that our sins are no longer held against us, but there could be many ways in which forgiveness is accomplished. How does atonement work, exactly? For example, if it requires payment, what are the particulars of that payment? If a person’s bad deed is paid for, does that person need to exist?

The major models of atonement in the Christian tradition offer some answers, but said answers involve much metaphor. Widespread use of metaphor is the third reason for the historical oversight. Ransom theory models maintain that Christ’s death freed us from the power of sin and death by serving as a ransom on our behalf. However, it appears this model cannot be literally true, since if it were it would make the Devil powerful enough that God would need to pay some sort of ransom to him to make things right. Christus Victor models maintain that Christ’s death and resurrection is a victory over evil that broke the power that sin had over humanity—but it is not metaphysically clear *how* this was a victory that broke said power. Satisfaction models maintain that Christ’s death satisfied the wrath of God that we deserved; penal substitution models that Christ, in his death, bore the punishment for our sins in our place.

Both satisfaction and substitution models appear to engage, at crucial points, in “forensic fiction” (O. Crisp, 2009, 436ff.). And even if it is literally true that Christ took away either our sins or punishment for our sins, satisfaction and substitution models themselves offer no metaphysical guidance for how this was accomplished.¹⁷ Finally, moral exemplar theories maintain that Christ, in his life and death, served as a moral teacher and exemplar that we must emulate in order to become right with God. But it is not clear how Christ’s example makes a sinner right with God—especially if the sinner died well before the Incarnation. The mere existence of an exemplary person gives no obvious benefit. Nor is it clear why Christ’s death was a necessary act.

¹⁷ How one might go about this sort of account is discussed below in the section “Consequence Removal Questions.”

These models are not all mutually exclusive, but there is widespread disagreement about which (if any) gives a proper account. These models are thin on metaphysical particulars. While metaphor is not without some interpretive guidance—after all, none viewing a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* would take Juliet to be a gaseous giant upon hearing “Juliet is the sun”—I take there to be either anxiety or complacency regarding the above atonement metaphors and others used in Scripture, which has prevented robust metaphysical discussions.

Here metaphysics can be of some use. One of the tasks of atonement theorizing is to distinguish metaphorical language from literal use. Is it *literally* the case that Jesus was “crushed for our iniquities . . . and by his bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5)? Is Christ *literally* a “ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6)? These are hard questions; but if we discover, say, that presentism is incompatible with a literal construal of one or more of these characterizations and we are presentists, then we have been helped a bit in our interpretive work.

Introducing theoretical considerations can often help illuminate what is ultimately at stake and whether our beliefs are consistent with the introduced theory. This is not to say that we cannot affirm that certain key ingredients of atonement theorizing, such as salvation (whether in terms of the forgiveness of sins or in the reconciliation of God with humanity), happen on any given theory of time. If the primary function of the atonement is salvation, this function can be fulfilled on either presentism or eternalism. But notably, what salvation looks like—*when* and *how* it comes to be—will vary.

What does it mean to say that our sin is relevantly removed? The available metaphors in Scripture also give us little guidance. Isaiah 44:22 says, “I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you”, while Acts 3:19 declares, “Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.” Regarding these metaphors, both presentists and eternalists may attempt to insist that their view is superior, in that it is the one that properly accounts for how sins are “swept away” or “wiped out.” Indeed, even the scriptural passages appear to be in temporal tension, as sins appear to have already been removed in one but have yet to be eliminated on the other.

Once the advantages and disadvantages of each theory have been laid bare, we can move toward reflective equilibrium between our theory of time and interpretation of atonement metaphors. If any reasonable understanding or interpretation of a metaphor includes p and a theory says *not-p*, then we are forced to decide between the two.

Here we should not be content to sit with mystery. Highly abstract metaphysical debates are relevant to philosophical theology in ways that are deeply important for even pastoral discussions and understanding—consider, for example, the importance of understanding what it means for Christ to be fully human and fully divine. What we can truthfully assert, even in pastoral contexts, will depend in part on our metaphysics. Pastoral utterances about the atonement include statements like “Jesus died specifically for your particular sin.” Is this a statement about Jesus’s general salvific work or about payment for a particular action that a specific person performed? The latter will require certain metaphysical machinery. Another pastoral comment, “One day there will be no evil,” similarly has different implications depending on one’s metaphysics. Is it that evil will cease to be performed? Or will evil be removed from reality altogether?

4. Existence Assumptions and Approaches to the Problem

At the heart of these questions are existence puzzles: Who needs to exist (or not) in order to remove the consequences of sin and evil generally, along with those of a particular sinner? In what follows, I assume Neo-Quineanism: There are no objects which do not exist. Thus, if an object or event has a property or stands in a relation, that object or event must exist.

There is a question not just about the existence of particular objects or events, but the nature of the properties they bear—depending on what kind of properties they are, different sorts of solutions will be available (or not). Here I will assume that there is something about the nature of personal sin and evil which has to do with the person themselves and is not merely an extrinsic property. I assume this due to a widespread

intuition about personal responsibility, which I call the *substantivity intuition*: If a person is to be properly held responsible for an action or have responsibility for an action remitted, such responsibility or lack thereof cannot be due to mere Cambridge change.

A mere Cambridge change is a change in purely relational or extrinsic properties, which has nothing to do with the actual objects or events in and of themselves.¹⁸ For instance, suppose Alice is shorter than Bob at a time t_1 and taller than Bob at t_5 and Bob remains the same height. Bob thus has the property *being taller than Alice* at t_1 and changes to having the property *being shorter than Alice* at t_5 . In contrast, an intrinsic property that Bob has is *being 5' 11"* (or also consider the changes in intrinsic properties that he can undergo, such as *being 5'* in 2000 and *being 5' 11"* in 2020). The latter sorts of properties have something to do with *Bob* in an important way that the former properties do not.

This is not to say that atonement has nothing to do with changes in relational properties. Indeed, such changes are to be expected if we are reconciled and made “at one” with another! But the point of this assumption is that atonement requires something more substantive than *mere* Cambridge changes. If I have wronged you, the problem cannot be solved simply by some sort of change that does not properly affect you. This idea generalizes to the substantivity intuition.

One can certainly resist the substantivity intuition, or perhaps reject Neo-Quineanism in favor of multiple quantifiers.¹⁹ However, one task of this chapter is to clear ground for future discussions, along with determining which ontological commitments constrain our theological

¹⁸ The term “Cambridge change” is due to Peter Geach (71–2). Geach uses it to argue against the view of change put forward by Cambridge professors, such as Bertrand Russell. According to Russell and many others, property change just is having a property at one time and lacking it at another (or vice versa). A poker changes from cold to hot simply by having the property being cold at t_1 and being hot at, say, t_5 . While there are debates about whether this account of change is substantial enough, I will not engage them here. I shall assume this account of change—popular with eternalists—works. The “mere” in the above classification of mere Cambridge change is thus of utmost importance. The example of the poker appears to involve either intrinsic property change or a robust relational change in the poker—something about the poker *itself* at least partially explains or accounts for the change. This is in contrast to mere Cambridge changes, which occur without reference to things like the nature of the poker itself.

¹⁹ Though I ultimately have my doubts about the prospects of the latter approach, sharing concerns related to those in van Inwagen (2009) and (2014).

commitments and vice versa. Thus, it behooves us to explore more constrictive requirements first and loosen those later if need be.

Together, Neo-Quineanism and the substantivity intuition generate some existence puzzles: It appears things need to exist in order to be atoned for. Thus, one might think all objects and events from all times need to exist in order for sin and evil to be removed. On the other hand, complete *removal* of sin and evil appears to require the elimination of sin and evil from the domain of things that exist. Evil is eliminated, full stop.

Here, then, is a choice point about the nature of the atonement itself. When we are made “at one,” how much evil and suffering is removed, and in what way? We must decide between:

- (1) *Evil Elimination*: Atonement makes it possible for all sin and evil to be removed from reality entirely; or
- (2) *Consequence Removal*: Atonement makes it possible for the consequences of sin and evil to be removed from reality.²⁰

Further, the Christian will have the following condition, related to but weaker than the *necessity requirement*:

- (3) The means of the atonement—the work of removing sin, evil, or its consequences—is primarily Christ’s sacrifice.

The fundamental choice between *Evil Elimination* and *Consequence Removal* is whether what has to be removed from reality is evil itself—including sin and all its negative consequences—or only the consequences of sin and evil. On this point, there are a few simple answers proponents of different temporal ontologies can give, in the hopes of claiming theological advantage.

Here it may seem this choice point offers a quick advantage to the presentist: She can affirm *Evil Elimination*, while the eternalist may only affirm *Consequence Removal*. Given eternalism, the past and the future also exist, which means that our past sinful acts still exist, even if we are

²⁰ Or, at minimum, it allows for the consequences to be transformed or overcome.

forgiven them. A robust view of evil elimination may seem to require a presentist metaphysics.

The eternalist's ontological commitment to the continued existence of my sin may appear problematic, given what many Christians want to say about Christ's salvific work. Due to the cross, the sins of those who believe have been "wiped out," swept away like a cloud. But, given eternalism, there is a very real sense in which the sins of the repentant haven't been swept away—they still exist. Thus, it looks like sin has an unacceptable foothold in reality, given that Christ's sacrifice and death is to have defeated sin and evil. Given eternalism, this sin remains. Presentism thus appears to be the superior view according to the *Evil Elimination* approach, since according to it the sins for which you have been forgiven no longer exist.

Here the eternalist will object that this is moving much too quickly. According to presentism, it is not the death or sacrifice of Christ that causes sin to cease to exist, but the mere passage of time. This is a violation of (3), the necessity requirement, and cannot be the correct view of the atonement, since it would trivialize the death of Christ—if all that is required is for sin to cease to exist, Christ's death is not needed at all! Sins and evil disappear, no special action needed. Additionally, the positive events associated with the atonement have, along with past sin, also been eradicated. According to presentism, the atoning death of Christ no longer exists—surely, the eternalist says, that is a worse consequence!²¹

So perhaps eternalism should be favored, since it affirms not just the continual existence of the death of Christ, but the eternal existence of his salvific death. It's always true that Christ's salvific act exists, full stop. While our past and future sinful acts will always exist, the act of

²¹ Whether this follows depends on one's theory of events. While not a presentist, Szabo (2006) thinks presentists should say events always exist, but do not always occur. However, it is unclear whether this view will fulfill either the Neo-Quinean condition or the substantivity intuition. The presentist also faces fatalist difficulties regarding future contingents, which will likely cause difficulty for parts of this strategy which involve future contingents (see Rea (2006)). The presentist can escape such fatalist concerns, but plausible ways of doing so involve rejecting the need for truths to be grounded in or supervene on reality (see Merricks (2007)) or denying that there are true future contingents (see Seymour (2016)). The viability of this general strategy remains one for future research.

redemption also always exists. Thus, the continued existence of our sinful acts need not bother us—they are eternally covered by the blood of the Lamb.²²

The presentist, on the other hand, must admit an existence gap between a large number of sins and the act that covers and atones for sins. Those that lived and died pre-Christ were without an act central to their forgiveness. If Christ's sacrifice on the cross is what "wipes out" sin, then even the pre-Incarnation faithful died without their sins properly dealt with. But this appears to be in contrast to passages of scripture which tell of forgiveness of sin before Christ.²³

The presentist can say, however, that the forgiveness given before Christ's death was fundamentally forward-looking—sins could be forgiven precisely because God knew of and planned the coming sacrifice of Christ.²⁴ However, the forgiveness was not complete, since a central piece required for it was missing until Christ's death. This incompleteness of forgiveness is not necessarily a drawback for the presentist, since this seems to be precisely what is taught in the book of Hebrews 11:39–40: "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect."²⁵ The presentist need not deny (3): She can say that Christ's death is what is responsible for complete consequence removal.

Presentists and eternalists can both affirm that sin is "wiped out" if this is understood as *Consequence Removal*. But eternalists appear unable to

²² Since eternalists affirm that all times and the events therein exist, they can say that there is never a time that the atonement doesn't reach, and thus affirm the declaration in Revelation 13:8 that Jesus is "the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world." The presentist is not forced to deny this, but she must explain the passage merely in terms of what God planned or intended and cannot take the passage literally.

²³ Isaiah 44:2; 2 Samuel 12:13. Note that this concern holds for any theory which affirms (3). As long as the primary means of atonement is Christ's sacrifice, something necessary for atonement was missing before said sacrifice, regardless of the particular mechanics of salvation itself.

²⁴ Isaiah 44:2; 2 Samuel 12:13: "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.'"

²⁵ Additional support for this view is found in Hebrews 11:13: "All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them." There is a view, however, that can affirm both that the sacrifice of Christ must exist in order for there to be forgiveness and that the pre-Incarnation faithful were forward-looking, having not received the promises: an eternalist A-series, wherein all objects and times exist, but time is also dynamic so that objects and times are objectively future, become present, and then pass into the past. This potential will be discussed in depth in a later section.

affirm *Evil Elimination*—to the extent that the continuing and eternal existence of sin and evil is a problem, her theory is worse off.

This is not necessarily a disadvantage according to much of the tradition: Most Christians affirm the doctrine of hell. Given hell, there will be some sort of unrepentant sin that continues to exist after the second coming of Christ and Judgment Day. As long as we admit that some sort of sin or evil will exist post-Judgment Day, why should it bother us if more sinful things still exist in time, even given redemption?

The relevant difference lies in the ability to affirm *Evil Elimination*: Presentism makes such a view at least theoretically possible, but eternalism does not. According to the presentist who believes in hell, the only continued existing sin or suffering from sin comes from those who rejected Christ. On eternalism, the sins of those at one with God and fully redeemed forever exist. The presentist also need not adopt the doctrine of hell and the continually existing suffering from sin that accompanies it. The presentist can maintain that God could prevent creatures from continuing to resist God (either by annihilating them or, if universalism is possible, by saving everyone); whereas, according to the eternalist, God cannot go back and erase an existing time where someone sinned. Presentism allows for the *option* of the removal of all sin and evil from existence (via annihilationism or universalism), whereas eternalism cannot. While atonement itself does not remove all sin and evil, a combination of presentism, atonement, and some other special divine action makes *Evil Elimination* possible.

5. Hypertime to the Rescue?

However, recent work by Samuel Lebens & Tyron Goldschmidt (2017) argues we could eat our cake and have it, too. They argue that theories of hypertime would allow God to change the past—atonement would thus remove all sin and evil. The good would remain, including the atoning acts, but the evil goes.²⁶ Accordingly, they present a picture where *Evil*

²⁶ They apply this to the Jewish tradition, though their temporal framework could be used by other religious traditions.

Elimination is accomplished by the atonement on what they call the Divine Proofreader Theory.

To do this, they utilize hypertime theories, according to which the domain of what exists keeps changing, as spacetime grows, shrinks, or develops. Growing block theories posit that past and present objects and events exist. As time moves on and new times become present, reality itself grows. But if reality is growing, “there must be a ‘second sort of time’ in which it does its growing” (van Inwagen, 2010, 14). This “second sort of time” is hypertime, and it is what makes sense of accidental necessity—there is a record of what that block *used* to be like, even after or despite radical changes.²⁷

Peter van Inwagen utilizes hypertime to argue for a non-paradoxical way of changing the past. One cannot, it was assumed, travel back in time, successfully kill one’s own grandparent, and have them remain dead. For the grandparent’s existence is causally necessary for the time traveler’s existing, traveling back in time in the first place, et cetera. Permanently removing the grandparent from the spacetime block is impossible—at least, according to traditional eternalist conceptions of time travel.

Combining hypertime with a spacetime block that can change changes everything. On a growing block theory, the time traveler could travel back to an earlier point in the block—and in so doing obliterate all that exists between her former present and her destination. Reality would move from being larger to smaller and then grow again. The traveler could kill her grandparent on this story, and the block continue to grow from there. But what the traveler could *not* do is make it so her grandparent never *hyper*-existed—for hypertime records or bears witness to the traveler’s being born, traveling backward in and through times which no longer exist according to the block, et cetera. While the traveler can eliminate her grandparent from the spacetime block, she cannot completely erase them from reality altogether. That is, she cannot eliminate them completely from the domain of existence, full stop. It remains true that there was such a person in the hyper-past.

²⁷ Accidental necessity: If it was the case that *p*, then it always will be the case that it was the case that *p*.

Hud Hudson (2014) develops this framework for theological use, according to which pain and suffering will continue to exist according to hyperhistory, but not in the past (193–4). Lebens and Goldschmidt go farther and attempt to completely eliminate sin and evil from hypertime itself—thus removing sin and evil from the domain of existence altogether. Utilizing an infinite series of hypertimes, they argue that God could always hyper-make it so that evil and sin did not exist according to an earlier hyperhistory. Consider an event of evil, E. Lebens and Goldschmidt

... propose that God can complete an infinite number of tasks, deleting all traces of E from time, hypertime, hyper-hypertime and so on. God can't undertake this supertask in time, nor in any level of the hypertime hierarchy, if he wants completely to eradicate E from every level.

(2017, 7)

God, being atemporal, performs this supertask outside of time. Thus, God could eliminate E from infinitely many timelines with no paradox (7–8). They think, “The supertask would atemporally exist, but the deleted evil wouldn't. There is no reason, besides incredulity, to deny that God could perform the supertask” (8).

While the theory is interesting, I believe it moves far too quickly. It is debatable whether such supertasks are possible, especially if the supertask is performed by a being who relates and responds to the free actions of temporal beings (regardless of whether the being itself is atemporal). Further, if such a supertask were accomplished, it appears we should never know about it—a temporal supertask should be manifest to us wherever we are in time. So, if God will eventually eliminate all evil from the world in this way, we should see no evil now.²⁸ Otherwise, the supertask would not be accomplished.

Second, accidental necessity appears to be conceptually, as well as metaphysically, necessary. Lebens and Goldschmidt label their complete elimination of evil as “Ultimate Forgiveness” (1). But it is difficult to see

²⁸ Here I agree with an anonymous reviewer cited in Lebens & Goldschmidt (2017) in footnote 7 on page 7.

how the view is actually about *forgiveness* when, arguably, the forgiveness itself will be erased, and not even God will see or know otherwise. For if there is a complete removal from reality of what was forgiven, it is difficult to see how the act of forgiveness could remain or even be intelligible—forgiveness requires something which was forgiven.²⁹

Consider: It seems reasonable to think inhabitants of heaven could wonder “What was I forgiven for?” But Lebens and Goldschmidt’s account seems in tension with any narrative the redeemed could tell in answer to such a question. Either God’s atoning act(s) remain in the domain of existence or they do not. If God’s atoning acts are eliminated by the supertask, then the atonement drops out of the story of union with God altogether, even to God. I wasn’t forgiven. No atonement occurred. The story simply is that we had a perfect life and now we are enjoying great union with God. On this option, their theory isn’t actually a theory about the atonement at all and can be ignored for now.³⁰

Lebens and Goldschmidt, however, endorse the other option, the view that sin and evil is gone, but God’s forgiveness and atoning acts remain (8). Herein lies the conceptual difficulty: You cannot be forgiven if you haven’t done anything wrong! And if there is no accidental necessity and my sin has been completely eliminated from reality, it simply is true that I have never done anything wrong, nor will I ever. My being forgiven, then, appears incoherent.

Surely God would want for our experience to make sense—for us to have internal self-awareness about what has happened to us and why we find ourselves in the position we are in. On Lebens and Goldschmidt’s view, if I ask, “What was I forgiven for?,” even God doesn’t know! We need to hold onto the principle of accidental necessity in the case of sin and forgiveness, because our reality in heaven won’t make sense without it—not just to us, but to God.

Initially, one might think Lebens and Goldschmidt can make use of the same strategies that are available to the presentist when trying to

²⁹ This is not just an issue about what must exist in order for certain relations to hold, though that is relevant. The stronger point is that the concept of forgiveness requires that there be wrongdoing that is no longer held against someone.

³⁰ Thanks to Jonathan Jacobs for this point.

answer questions about the nature of the past and future. Suppose the presentist agrees that truth supervenes on being: If a proposition about the past is true, then there must be an appropriate object or event for that truth to supervene on. Objects and events that are merely past, however, lack anything for a truth to supervene on—or so the objection goes.³¹ Thus, the presentist cannot adequately account for the difference between a world in which it is true that *a brachiosaur walked on this spot 150 million years ago* and a world in which it is true that *the world came into existence five minutes ago*. The same would hold true for atoning events, such as the crucifixion.

The presentist has available a method to solve the puzzle that Lebens and Goldschmidt do not—appeal to something which exists on which the truth supervenes (or perhaps more strongly: grounds or makes true the proposition in question). Bigelow (1996) argues that the world itself instantiates properties like *there were previously brachiosaurs*; T. Crisp (2007) appeals to presently existing, abstract times. These and other presentist strategies are used in order to account for *truths*, whether in terms of supervenience, truth-making, or grounding: Given this, Lebens and Goldschmidt cannot adopt any of them without it being true that, for instance, I sinned.³² And a Christian has some reason to think evil is not eliminated from the narrative entirely but somehow redeemed—for the resurrected Christ's body still bears signs of crucifixion (see John 20:24–9).³³

A main motivation of Lebens and Goldschmidt is to make sense of scriptural passages about forgiveness and atonement by examining the imagery to see what is to be taken literally, and what is metaphysically required to do so. I share this motivation. One of their key passages is Isaiah 43:25: “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own

³¹ See Sider (2001), 35ff.

³² Another presentist strategy is to deny that truth does supervene on being (See Merricks (2007)). This may be a promising route for Lebens and Goldschmidt, though they will still face the conceptual difficulty about forgiveness.

³³ Other methods Lebens and Goldschmidt use (e.g., the moving spotlight and hyper-presentism) appear to give theoretical advantages only on par with the presentist's ability to have evil eliminated as discussed in the previous section. While Lebens and Goldschmidt do not specifically reference the above debate and my use, they acknowledge the shared benefits and drawbacks I'm noting when discussing “Ostrich Temporalism” (10).

sake and I will not remember your sins.” They take this lack of remembrance seriously. If God does not remember and God is omniscient, then the sins must not exist. Or at least, we have good reason to think so.

However, while I find the metaphysical theorizing rich, such literal non-remembrances do not appear necessary or merited given a strict reading of the textual language alone. The passages regarding the word ‘remember’ do not appear to promise or indicate complete removal of evil and sin from God’s thought. The root Hebrew word that is here translated as ‘remember’ is זָכַר [‘zakar’], which has an active component.³⁴ The remembering is not simply intellectual—it is meant to move one to action based on what one is remembering and one’s relationship or duties to the events or persons involved. It is also used in contexts of announcing, praising, holding against, and proclaiming.

We can see this in other passages with the same word, where it seems clear God had not eliminated either the thought or existence of the relevant person: “Then God remembered Rachel, and heeded and opened her womb” (Genesis 30:22).³⁵ If I ‘zakar’ my mother’s birthday, I will not just know that it is today—I will give her a call. Remembering that it is trash day, on this conception, is not just intellectually knowing trash is collected—I will go outside and move the cans to the curb. If I do not remember, in this way, an action someone did against me, I will not go about proclaiming it to others and acting in accordance with it.

Given this, I set their theory aside for now and will assume accidental necessity: If it has been the case that p , then it always will be that it has been the case that p . *Evil Elimination* needs not just a dynamic theory of time, but one in which past (sinful or evil) times go out of existence. Accidental necessity mandates that sin and evil cannot be eliminated from reality entirely on a non-presentist view—and perhaps on a presentist ontology as well, depending on what accounts for the grounding of past and future truth-claims.

So rather than focusing simply on the advantages of mere existence (or non-existence), it would behoove presentists and eternalists to examine

³⁴ See Logos Bible Database, ‘zakar’ (2020).

³⁵ Among other passages that use this conception of memory, see Genesis 8:1, Genesis 19:29, Esther 9:28, Psalm 106:45, Isaiah 12:4, Isaiah 43:26.

more closely what is meant by the Christian metaphors of “wiping away” sin and being “covered” by the blood of Christ. Let us turn, then, to *Consequence Removal* theories.

6. Consequence Removal Questions

The first question to ask is: How does the consequence removal of atonement *work*? First, we must figure out what the consequences are. Then, presentism and eternalism will have importantly different implications. We first start with the general:

(4) *Mechanics Question*: How does atonement happen?

Answering (4) will tell us important things about the metaphysics underpinning the act(s) of atonement, and different atonement theories will have different implications. An informative answer to (4) will involve both a description of the relevant consequences removed by atonement, as well as an explanation of how they are removed.³⁶ Any such explanation, by its nature, will involve answers to the:

(5) *Temporal Question*: When does atonement happen?

Answering (5) will tell us important things about cross-time relations, should there be any. Importantly, an answer to the temporal question will at least attempt to explain in what sense Christ’s death is “once for all.” Hebrews 9:28a tells us that Christ was “offered once to bear the sins of many.”³⁷ Does this mean that Christ’s redemptive work was completely accomplished on the cross?³⁸

³⁶ The term “consequences” applies broadly, to cover the effects of sin that must be dealt with in order to have restoration—whether those effects amount to something like debts that need to be paid for or shame and guilt that needs to be healed depends on the particular atonement theory in question.

³⁷ This requirement is also found in 1 Peter 3:18a: “For Christ also suffered once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.”

³⁸ I do not mean to indicate that the Father and Spirit play no role in atonement—only that being an offering for the forgiveness of sins is the work of the Son. The full work, timing, and effects of the atonement involve more than one agent (indeed, for the Christian, it must involve at least three!).

There is reason to think that while *something* was completely accomplished during the crucifixion³⁹—perhaps forgiveness—atonement itself cannot be accomplished all at one time. For atonement involves multiple parties being made “at one.” To truly be made at one with another, forgiveness is not enough. One must be reconciled to another. The former can occur without the latter. For instance, one can forgive a debt without being reconciled, as one may continue to be estranged from the former debtor.

Richard Swinburne argues that atonement requires four features: repentance, apology, reparations, and penance.⁴⁰ The initial work of atonement, reparations, is the feature that plausibly happens at one time on the cross, fulfilling the “offered once for many” scriptural desideratum.⁴¹ But the other three features do not need to happen all at one time. If they had to be all at once, then Christians would be committed to, at minimum, a view on which every individual eventually made at one with God exist at the moment(s) of the crucifixion. This is highly implausible, as I will argue below.

For now, then, we will limit consideration of “Christ’s redemptive work” to what Christ himself accomplished. But even if the “at one time” requirement is limited to reparations (or something like it), the temporal question admits further fineness of grain, such as:

- (5a) Is the initial act of Christ’s atoning work different from the effects of this atoning work, and if so, how?

That is, is the reparative work of the atonement (both the action and effects thereof) accomplished all at one time (or within a small period of time)?⁴² Or does the initial divine saving act occur all at one time, which

³⁹ See John 19:30. ⁴⁰ Swinburne (1989), 81.

⁴¹ One may respond that apology, repentance, and penance are creaturely actions, and thus do not count as *Christ’s* redemptive work. This sort of response appears to have too narrow of a conception of effects. I am able to make proper penance only if the offended party will accept what I do, and the penance I give to God for my sin is accepted *because* of the atoning work of Christ. However, a discussion focusing more particularly on Christ’s specific work is below.

⁴² Some may reject any interpretation that implies that Christ’s death was necessary for atonement. Instead, his death accomplished atoning work that could have been accomplished some other way. As noted earlier, this is set aside for our purposes. There is an additional question of whether Christ’s atoning work at the crucifixion was, by itself, *the* initial act, or

then has its salvific effects spread throughout history? To answer these questions, we must determine what sort of cross-time relations are involved (if any). There are further puzzles, too, about the temporal boundaries of events and when the full effects of events are settled.

One quick response is to insist that there are no cross-time relations involved: Even if atonement requires acts (or acceptance of an act) from at least two agents, these happen all at one time. While the initial act of Christ's salvific work is conceptually distinct from its effects, the act and effects are synchronic (or near enough to not cause great difficulty). Thus, the full, complete effects of Christ's reparative atoning work for individuals occurred all at one time.

This response is implausible, as it requires an extreme form of mind-body dualism. If Christ's full and complete atoning work for individuals had to happen all at one time—no cross-time relations allowed—it plausibly requires not only the existence of every individual atoned for at the time of the crucifixion but their conscious awareness and assent or acceptance of the atoning act.⁴³ If that is the case, then one would need an extreme form of dualism, wherein each atoned person not only existed but was conscious and able to make decisions at the moment(s) of the cross. It would not be enough for those individuals to simply exist, quantifiers unrestricted, as part of the atoning work for individuals existing in the past or future relative to the cross would then take place at those other times when those individuals exist.

Thus, unless either party wants to be an extreme dualist, presentists and eternalists must agree that the full scope of atonement takes place, in *some* sense, at different times. The disagreement will then center on whether the individuals existing at times other than those of the cross

rather one among many. That is, did the acts and events at that time encompass all of the reparative work needed for atonement or all of the divine atoning act? Perhaps Christ's earthly ministry somehow helpfully contributes, or the like. One might also think that Christ's death was both necessary for atonement and for any further atoning work to be accomplished. Disambiguating acts and their effects will get more complicated if one thinks that atonement is not fully captured by the forgiveness of the sins of individuals.

⁴³ Unlike ordinary Cartesian dualism, which can allow for souls to come into existence after the time of the crucifixion, this dualism requires that all people exist at the time of the crucifixion. And unlike a Williamsonian view of necessary existents, all people must have robust enough existence so as to have certain sorts of conscious experience and ability to, for example, assent.

must exist *simpliciter* when the crucifixion exists and the nature of cross-time relations—that is, over the truth of eternalism, among other things.⁴⁴

If we (reasonably) think that the full or initial divine act(s) of atonement were not instantaneous, but happened across time, how much does that theoretically constrain us?⁴⁵ Unfortunately, it is even unclear what it takes for some events to happen “all at one time.”⁴⁶ Judith Jarvis Thomson (1971) famously raises puzzles for what time an event like a killing takes place.

With some events, it seems clear how to make this determination. Suppose Jill and Jane jump at t_1 . Jill and Jane’s jumping then happens all at one time— t_1 . But some actions do not seem to admit this sort of easy analysis. Suppose instead that Jill shoots Jane at t_1 and Jane succumbs to her wounds and dies at t_5 . When did Jill kill Jane? It’s hard to say—one attempted answer is that Jill’s killing of Jane happened “all at one time”, since what was necessary for the death (and thus killing) of Jane all occurred at t_1 .⁴⁷

A verdict of the killing’s occurring “all at one time” due to the necessitation of the future death seems unsatisfactory. It is true that *the* important act of bringing about Jane’s death occurred at t_1 . It is even true that Jill intended to kill Jane at t_1 . But another important element in the killing of Jane—Jane’s death—does not occur until t_5 . Though Jill shot Jane at t_1 , Jill’s killing Jane depends on whether Jane dies.⁴⁸ Given this,

⁴⁴ This is not quite right, since even if one thinks that all individuals that need to be atoned for must exist, one is not forced to be an eternalist. One can posit, for instance, a modified shrinking block which stops shrinking once humans begin to exist. But this is an odd view, and one I cannot see anyone wanting. Hence it is easier, as noted above, to simply limit the discussion to presentism and eternalism.

⁴⁵ For sake of simplicity, I had assumed Christ’s death had occurred at one moment. But this does not seem to be the case—deaths can be long, drawn-out affairs (and one might expect a particularly painful death that is to do atoning work for all humans for all time to take at least a little while—as it turns out, around three hours). One might think that this instantly favors non-presentist views, since presentism appears to have a difficult time accounting for events that last over a period of time. However, this again is simply another manifestation of the problem of cross-time relations and I refer the interested reader to T. Crisp (2005) for a presentist account of how to deal with cross-time relations.

⁴⁶ Thanks to Michael Rea for prompting this discussion.

⁴⁷ This example is taken, with names changed, from Thomson (1971).

⁴⁸ Securing this death turns out to be tricky business. Suppose the laws of nature ensure that Jill’s shooting Jane at t_1 would result in Jane’s death at t_5 . We still cannot say that Jill killed Jane

one of the most plausible answers to the question, “When did Jill kill Jane?” is that “there is no true answer to the question of when A killed B that gives a time-span smaller than the minimal one that includes both A’s shooting of B and the time of B’s death”—at least, this is the answer Thomson herself gives.⁴⁹ Jill’s killing of Jane seems to occur across time, not all at one time. The killing depends on something to do with Jane as well as Jill.

The question, then, is what this dependence requires. For Christ’s atoning work, though occurring at the moment(s) of the crucifixion and death, does not seem relegated to those times. Unless one thinks that Christ’s work on the cross necessitates the atonement of the elect,⁵⁰ the completion of atonement somehow depends on us.⁵¹

Those who hold views according to which Christ’s atoning work at the crucifixion somehow necessitates salvation—certain Calvinists, determinists, fatalists, or universalists (as the last group believes all will be saved)—are arguably able to treat Christ’s “all at one time” atoning work in the same manner as Jill and Jane jumping together. While perhaps linguistically awkward, it does not seem incoherent to say that Jill killed Jane at t_1 even though Jane only died at t_5 if the shooting event at t_1 necessitates Jane’s death. After all, Jane can even cry out at t_1 , “You’ve killed me!” The question is what happens if we take the necessitation view of an event’s being accomplished: Jill killed Jane at t_1 because it was settled at that time that Jane would die, even though it took Jane until t_5

at t_1 —God could decide to obliterate the universe at t_4 , and thus Jill could fail to kill Jane. Those who wish to identify the killing of Jane with the shooting that occurs at t_1 must either deny that such miracles can happen or be determinists.

⁴⁹ Thomson (1971), 122. This is, however, by no means the only reasonable answer. Another compelling answer is that terms like ‘killing’ are inexact, and are used, at various times, as terms indicating the success of an intentional action, to demonstrate an agent’s responsibility (e.g., Jane died because of something Jill did), or to draw one’s attention to a certain state of affairs. Each of these other answers opens up further avenues of exploration but examining each one is beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace.

⁵¹ Affirming this dependence need not make one Pelagian nor semi-Pelagian (heretical views according to which, to varying degrees, humans have the ability to see that they need God and accept Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf without divine help). This dependence need not be robust. Consider again the case of Jill’s killing Jane. The killing depends on Jane, but Jane did nothing to actively bring it about (in fact, one may imagine she tried to avoid it).

to die.⁵² So, the killing happened all at one time.⁵³ *Mutatis mutandis* for Christ's salvific work: If the event(s) of the crucifixion in some way necessitated the atonement of the elect (whoever they may be), then Christ's atoning work could have happened all at one time at the moment(s) of the crucifixion.⁵⁴

There is, however, a general theological reason along with the metaphysical and linguistic reasons to think that ultimate atonement is temporally distinct from forgiveness. The doctrine of unlimited atonement is widely accepted (though not universally), and states that the forgiveness of sins that happens on the cross is not just for those who respond favorably and are ultimately reconciled to God, "but also for the sins of the whole world."⁵⁵ Christ atones without limit for all, regardless of individuals' responses.⁵⁶

On this view, the reparative work of Christ can take place at one time: The relevant act thus appears to be the forgiveness of sin, or the defeat of principalities and powers generally, et cetera. And if this is the case, then it appears that the act of sins being *forgiven* happened all at one time, when Christ was on the cross.

While forgiveness can happen at one time, the effects of such forgiveness (e.g., individuals' acceptance of the gift of the cross; the struggle with and elimination of a sinful nature) happen at different points in time. If one distinguishes between the initial act of atonement (reparations of some sort) and the effects of the atonement (e.g., individuals' acceptance of the gift of the cross), atonement seems to operate in a manner akin to

⁵² There is dispute about what this sort of settling requires—see footnote 49 for some of the difficulty. But whatever it requires, the sort of necessitation which follows from fatalism, determinism, and the like—views which guarantee the outcome in question—will count as settling in this case, at t_1 , Jane's future death. After t_1 , it is unavoidable.

⁵³ Thomson rejects this sort of account (120), in large part because she does not think there is this sort of necessitation—though she thinks the proposal sounds odd even with necessitation. She says the above example is rather the "Hollywood" use of language. There are important questions, too, about what is necessary in order to have this event be settled.

⁵⁴ Though necessitation views may have other sorts of concerns related to the problem of evil.

⁵⁵ 1 John 2:2. The full verse is "and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." Due to verses which reference the Son dying for the whole world (cf. John 3:16–17), I will not delve into the Calvinist view of limited atonement, according to which Christ only died for the elect.

⁵⁶ Although a universalist can say that there is atonement for all and universal response.

Jill's killing Jane—and our answers to the above questions should reflect our general solutions to the “time of a killing” problem.

At this point, another quick response emerges: Isn't the presentist who avoids such a necessitating response, as discussed above, done for? The view under consideration is now committed not only to cross-time relations but quantifying over time-spans. If any proper account of Jill's killing Jane must include the time-span of Jill's shooting of Jane to the time of Jane's death, it may appear that we are forced to quantify over the things that exist during these times. And in the case of the atonement, this would mean from Christ's death to the full atoning effects in the lives of individuals across time. Thus, it appears we are forced to be eternalists. Given our Neo-Quineanism, we either need to ontologically commit to such time-spans or give a proper paraphrase.

Here presentists are not without reply. They have several strategies for solving the problem of cross-time relations. Even if one thinks that proper accounts of the temporal location of the event must “include the time-span,” one is not forced to quantify over a set of times, fusion of time slices, or objects from multiple times in so doing. And the problem raised here is not particular to theorizing about the atonement—the above examples are instances of a more general objection to presentism that charges that the view cannot properly account for events, by assuming that a proper account of events must refer to concrete times, time slices, or objects existing at multiple times.

One way for the presentist to give such an account is to reduce—the presentist can say that “time-spans” and events properly reduce to a presentist-friendly view of causal interaction of objects. She could escape the difficulty by maintaining that the world itself contains many irreducible past-tensed properties such as *being such that Jill shot Jane*, *being such that Jane suffered for a bit*, and *being such that Jane died from her gunshot wound from Jill at t_5* .⁵⁷ Or she could maintain that times are abstract objects akin to possible worlds, and thus make reference to times and time-spans without committing herself to non-present things.⁵⁸

How this works depends on the particulars of one's atonement theory, which will be delved into more deeply below. If one finds the above sorts

⁵⁷ See Bigelow (1996).

⁵⁸ See T. Crisp (2007).

of presentist responses unsatisfying, then one appears to simply find presentism itself unsatisfying. In that case, one is not rejecting presentism on any grounds particular to the atonement but is instead making a theory choice due to much more general reasons (discussion of which is beyond the scope of this chapter). The failure, then, is not due to atonement theorizing but to general theoretical difficulties with cross-time relations.

In fact, the distinction between the initial act of atonement and the effects of said initial act helps the presentist answer a particular existence problem raised earlier about the existence of the crucifixion and its causal efficacy over time. The passage of time is not all that is required in order for things to be made right in the world and making things right in the world need not require that the death of Christ always exist.

Suppose I burn down my neighbor's house. According to the presentist, while my act of burning down the house no longer exists, there is still a scar on reality that needs to be taken care of that the mere passage of time cannot make better. There are ashes where a house once stood. While my act of sinning no longer exists, the consequences of my sin do. The house must be rebuilt.

Similarly, good effects can last over time. The presentist can say that while Christ's death no longer exists, the effects of his death last forever. And the effects of Christ's death are needed to make things ultimately right with the world and to ensure that the least amount of evil exists, post-Judgment Day. Thus, again, it is available to the presentist to say that post-Judgment Day, sin and evil cease to exist entirely—the events themselves are erased by the passage of time, while the effects are wiped away by Christ's work and our repentance.

7. Explicating the Metaphors: 'Transfer' Views

Given this, it is worth exploring how the effects of sin and evil are "wiped away." One way of understanding this interaction is in terms of some sort of property transfer between Christ and the relevant person(s). Christ appears to gain a relevant property, while the sinner loses it—or at least, the conditions are provided for the sinner to lose the property in

question at a later point in time. This is a way of understanding 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin that knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” There are many ways this could be understood, so here I must speak in some generality. The property or properties in question may be understood as *guilt, unrighteousness, being counted as a sinner, needing to pay a debt*, or the like, which are transferred to Christ—the particular properties will depend on the theory in question. Other accounts involve a transfer from Christ to the sinner, perhaps of *moral uprightness, perfect obedience*, or *not being under the control of sin* (though Christ will also retain these properties).

Making sense of this involves not only a question about cross-time relations but the nature of the properties in question. The nature of the properties themselves will determine what sort of cross-time relation is necessary, and thus our ontological commitments generally. A family of views appear to require a property transfer.⁵⁹

I call these *transfer views*: Something is transferred between Christ and another party due to (and possibly during) the atoning act. Among the transfer views are satisfaction theory, penal substitution, vicarious punishment, and ransom theory. On satisfaction, penal substitution, and vicarious punishment theories, some property or properties are transferred between Christ and the sinner(s); this property transfer of, for example, guilt resolves the need for punishment or payment. God the Father may also be involved in the transfer as well, depending on the theory. Some sort of payment by Christ is necessary for the removal of the consequences of sin for the individuals who sin. On a ransom view, some relevant property is transferred between the devil and Christ (though humans may be involved in the transfer as well).

⁵⁹ Christus Victor accounts, according to which atonement requires defeat of certain principalities and powers, may also count as property transfer views, depending on how said defeat occurs. Perhaps one event that happens at atonement is that the property *having dominion or authority over person p* is transferred from the principality or power to Christ. However, both this understanding of Christus Victor (and ransom theory) must answer concerns about Christ’s power and preeminence: It appears that, as God, Christ must already have the properties of *having dominion and authority over everything*, which includes person *p*. And as noted before, a common complaint against ransom theory is that it appears to give the devil entirely too much power.

In what follows, I will assume some sort of penal substitution theory for ease of explication: that is, that on the cross, Christ had to pay a penalty for us in order to remove our sin or the consequences of it. How did his payment work?

Here again, there are overly simplistic answers which fail and more nuanced (and promising) responses. On one simple conception of property-transfer, we might insist that the property transfer in question itself happens *during* the atoning act. This sort of property transfer appears to require non-presentism, since it requires the existence of all the objects and properties related to such a property transfer: Both the sinner and the relevant properties must exist in order for those properties (of guilt, unrighteousness, et cetera) to be transferred to Christ on the cross (and to have any relevant properties transferred from Christ to the sinner).⁶⁰

It cannot be the case that Christ only later has the relevant properties transferred to himself in the future when new sinners come into existence and sin, since this violates the condition that Christ be offered only once for the sins of many. Similarly, if eternalism is false, Christ cannot have transferred to himself the sins of those who have already died, since they no longer exist and thus cannot have their properties transferred to Christ. While some properties related to past sinners might exist, they cannot be properly thought to be the properties *of* non-existent objects. Again, given Neo-Quineanism, there are no objects which do not exist.

However, this notion of transfer “during” the event turns out to be unwieldy. Even if the property transfer requires that all parties and properties exist, the mere existence of said parties and properties is not enough to secure said transfer *during* the moment(s) of Christ’s atoning act(s). One may wonder how, exactly, the properties are to be transferred *away* from the sinner, given the eternalist picture (where everything always exists).

Here, any acceptable account of property transfer must offer an account of change over time. I have thus far been speaking of eternalists as if they all universally endorsed the same account of the past, present,

⁶⁰ Unless one is committed to the extreme mind-body dualism discussed earlier.

and future and change over time. I will continue, for now, to speak of eternalists in terms of static eternalism, also known as the B-theoretic eternalists.⁶¹ Static eternalists reject a dynamic theory and argue there cannot be any change that is not simply a difference between what properties objects have at different times. For instance, a poker's having the property of being cold at t_1 and being hot at t_{10} just is what it takes for there to be property change in the poker from cold to hot.

But an overly simplistic view of property *transfer* appears also to require a dynamic understanding of said transfer, which begs the question against such an eternalist. On a dynamic conception of change, it is possible for an object to simply not have a property anymore, full stop. A particularly strong reading of transfer appears to require non-eternalism.

A view one might take of property transfer is that of a "property swap," somehow occurring at one time. But this view appears to be in a double bind. If the properties are *always* transferred in such a way that the existence of all parties is necessary, surely the transferred properties of redemption must always be there and have always been *transferred*. There is always redemption—and if that transfer as understood in a strong sense has *always* happened, the view appears to be contradictory. For, somehow, it is both true that: It is always the case that I am a sinner at t , and it is always not the case that I am a sinner at t ; I'm always redeemed!

Such an understanding of a property swap requires both a dynamic theory of time and non-presentism, since all relevant parties and properties need to exist at the moment(s) of the initial atoning act. Those who want to endorse a view like this are led back to Lebens and Goldschmidt, and the previous difficulties discussed.⁶² The problem thus appears not

⁶¹ I address the alternative in the later section "Eternalist A-theory to the Rescue?"

⁶² Notably, Lebens and Goldschmidt's proposed "Ultimate Forgiveness—Amputation" (13) appears to be a transfer view (though, importantly, without the Christian presuppositions). Again, some of the discussion can apply to multiple traditions' views of atonement. Lebens and Goldschmidt's view faces fewer problems than the above response and discussion, since identifying Christ's actions as (an initial component of) the divine atoning supertask poses many problems due to being in time. Lebens and Goldschmidt do not identify the divine supertask with this event and thus avoid the particular problem.

to be with presentism or eternalism, but with this conception of property transfer.⁶³

Given the immense difficulty of making sense of a simplistic “property swap” property-transfer view, we have good reason to think the imagery supporting the view, that is, “God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,”⁶⁴ non-literal. If they are to be viable, transfer views should not entail that Christ became a sinner.⁶⁵

After all, Christ cannot *literally* be made to be sin—first, because persons cannot be changed into events or properties and, second, because divinity and sin are incompatible. Conversely, we do not literally become the righteousness of God. Our understanding of Christ becoming a sinner in our place has certain ontological boundaries—the focus must be on the notion of “in our place” or something (either a property, event, or experience) relevantly close to being a sinner or in our place, rather than a simplistic, literal understanding.⁶⁶

Here we must choose what to prioritize in our theorizing: What is more important, the existence of objects, other properties, or events, or something dynamic?

Eternalists are able to say that the transfer happened during the initial atoning event(s)—or, at least, enough for the property to count as transferred over time. Cross-time relations, and thus relations of property transfer, simply hold between objects or events happening at different times. The cross-time event, then, is simply the event of such a relation’s coming to hold.

However, there are still some puzzles to be dealt with, regarding identifying that event of a relation’s coming to hold, along with what it

⁶³ The eternalist can sidestep problems related to the property swap view—that is, it’s always being true that I am a sinner and it’s always being true that I’m not seen by God as a sinner—by making a distinction between logical ordering of propositions and properties, even among atemporal truths. But interesting questions remain regarding when to identify our status of being sinners, being forgiven, et cetera.

⁶⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

⁶⁵ The deeply problematic nature of Christ’s becoming a sinner—or having an experience near enough—is discussed in the next section.

⁶⁶ In general, the transfer views seem to focus more on understanding what it means for Christ to be “in our place” or to take our place (in terms of punishment, et cetera). For a focus on being relevantly close to the sinner in the needed (atoning) respect, see the solidarity views discussed in the next section.

is for properties to be transferred during an act.⁶⁷ Suppose my great-great-grandmother and I are exactly the same height when each of us is 4 years old.⁶⁸ It is unclear when this event of our “being the same height” takes place.⁶⁹ At both times? Only later when I reach the same height? Or possibly across all the times between our being the same height? Since there is a temporal gap in which nothing relevant seems to hold between my great-great-grandmother’s height and my own, intuitions which tempt one toward a response affirming the event happens across times may expand to include all times whatsoever: Perhaps it is always the case that my great-great-grandmother is this height in 1836 and I that height in 1989. And it is a logical truth that these heights are identical. Or we might deny that there is such an event altogether. At the very least, the puzzle regarding when the relation comes to hold may be dismissed for now for one of two reasons: It is either a particular case of the more general “time of a killing” puzzle discussed in the previous section (and thus we should give an answer consistent with our previous one here) or it is irrelevant, as the relation described involves mere Cambridge changes (or something near enough). Which it is depends on the nature of the properties or relations in question. Thus, it can be set aside for now.

One might insist, however, that at least the eternalist has options. Certain plausible, or possibly necessary views, appear unavailable to the presentist. For the presentist is restricted to just one time in which the relation can hold. The presentist cannot immediately appeal to

⁶⁷ There are puzzles about whether there can be a moment or instant of change—that is, a moment during which change actually happens (see Priest (2006)).

⁶⁸ Thanks to Dean Zimmerman for this example.

⁶⁹ This is a motivating concern for Szabo (2006). He cites Sextus Empiricus’ example: “Helen [of Troy] had three husbands” (399). But she didn’t have them all at the same time; she had them successively. So at what time is it true that Helen had three husbands? Szabo gives a view on which events always presently exist but only sometimes occur. The presentist, ironically, may regard this as a Trojan Horse: such a view will likely force the presentist to surrender her Neo-Quineanism or her non-fatalist intuitions. One way to escape these problems is to highlight the presentist’s commitment to a dynamic theory of time—but such a non-fatalist commitment to dynamic theories likely involves serious tensing of the sort which would allow her to escape this kind of counting problem altogether. For the presentist who wants atemporal propositions, which may appear to generate the problem, T. Crisp’s (2007) offers a promising route forward.

backward-looking properties, should those properties have causal power.⁷⁰

But this all depends, again, on the nature of the properties transferred. There are many cases of property transfer which are not obviously a problem for the presentist. Certain sorts of property transfers, especially in a legal setting, do not appear overly mysterious: A will, for example, dictates the conditions for transferring certain possessions of mine to someone else upon my death (and perhaps upon other conditions contained within the will), and there are consequences that follow for the recipient.

A common complaint about penal substitution theories, however, is that they are morally inappropriate in a way that a will is not.⁷¹ There is nothing *prima facie* morally wrong about gifting someone my money; there does seem to be—at least in ordinary cases—something morally wrong with taking an earned severe punishment on behalf of someone else. Consider again the will example: While someone will end up with my money, this change seems extrinsic to them—or at least, too close to a mere Cambridge change to rest satisfied that this is the correct account of how the atoning property transfer works.

One way to escape the moral concern is to assume that some sort of relevant property connected to being a sinner or deserving punishment is

⁷⁰ Further, doing so will result in fatalist problems, see Rea (2006) and Seymour (2016), especially if one argues that an event that occurs entirely at *t* can depend for its occurrence on much later events occurring. A presentist might say that the event of a cross-temporal relation coming to hold is restricted entirely to one of the two times. This may be the case, but it does not immediately solve the problem since the relevant properties must be transferred. Dean Zimmerman has suggested to me the following: Suppose a particular painting *p* was worth one million dollars in 1990. In 2020, I bid on another painting, causing that second painting to be worth twice as much as the first painting *p* was in 1990. However, this appears to be a mere Cambridge change. But suppose instead that I bid on the first painting in 2020, raising the price of *p* from one million to two million dollars. I thus cause the painting to be worth twice as much in 2020 as it was in 1990. While my bidding changes a property of *p* (how much it is currently worth), it is important to note that this need not change anything about the properties of painting *p* in 1990—to say otherwise is to run afoul of the in/at distinction with worlds and times. Consider a related example with possible worlds: It is possible that I have a child, but that does not mean there is an existing possible child out there in, say, world *w* with properties. So, the second painting case does not appear to be a true case of property transfer after all. There are further interesting cases of when properties come to be and how they do so, but these will take us to questions addressed in the “Consequence Removal Questions” section’s discussion of Judith Jarvis Thomson.

⁷¹ For a defense of penal substitution, however, see Strabbing (2016).

somehow transferred between the relevant parties. At the very least, Christ represents the sinner in some way as being a bearer of a relevant property. And here, existence questions will arise again: Must the person in question exist in order for this property to be transferred? Here we must remember the Neo-Quinean commitment.

We might think this concern can be quickly answered in the way the presentist does in other sorts of cases. Consider other cases of property transfer: Coaches of football teams can gain and lose properties such as *being the coach with the most Superbowl wins* or even *being the first coach of the football franchise team with the most total Superbowl wins*. These sorts of property transfers can take place regardless of whether the coaches in question are living or dead.⁷² One might think that Christ's atoning act(s) and the relevant property transfers can work in this way: If Christ's representing me (a sinner) is important, and if Christ's representing me can be determined later (as per the earlier discussion of Judith Jarvis Thomson), then why not think that some later act of mine, such as repentance, would transfer the property backward in the relevant way? My repenting, then, is not unlike how my coaching of a football team could transfer a property to a long-dead person or how my accepting the conditions of a will could transfer riches to me from someone now dead.

However, the mechanics of this suggestion are unclear and of the utmost importance. Gaining and losing properties like *being the first coach of the football franchise team with the most total Superbowl wins* appear to be mere Cambridge changes, or near enough for our purposes. For there is nothing about my winning or a currently existing franchise that looks like it directly relates in the right sort of way to a particular past coach. While a past coach's efforts and wins might contribute to the current state of affairs and wins of a team, the current state of affairs does not appear to be *about* the past coach in the right sort of way, since the property involves games won by the team by later coaches. (In fact, there are Neo-Quinean concerns regarding the above way of even framing the case, which will be addressed below.)

Here's one way of seeing the difficulty: Even if we limit discussion to relational properties, some are more substantive or robust than others.

⁷² Thanks to Dean Zimmerman for pressing these examples.

Utilizing less robust properties in certain circumstances sounds, at best, odd. Consider the property of *coach with the most lifetime wins*. This is a property that some coach has and can lose at a later time—even after death, should another coach surpass one’s total lifetime wins posthumously. But a substantive posthumous transfer of that property (if such a property is indeed substantive) can only go one way: from the deceased football coach to some currently living coach. A substantive property cannot be transferred backward from a living football coach to one who is long dead, since it appears incoherent to say that someone in the past can change in a non-mere-Cambridge way in virtue of something’s happening at a later time.

Given the substantivity intuition about the atonement—that it, at the very least, involves something more robust than mere Cambridge change—we have reason to think that such minimal, backward-looking accounts of property transfer are insufficient. The event of the crucifixion is in the past. Transferring a property from a presently existing (or future) sinner back to the crucifixion appears more akin to transferring the property of *coach with the most lifetime wins* backward to someone.⁷³ For Christ is, on these views, supposed to take something substantive of ours upon himself.

At the very least, more must be said about how such backward-looking property transfer is substantive enough.⁷⁴ This sort of change appears akin to mere Cambridge change rather than something substantial in and for the agent herself. And atonement requires, at some point, something substantial for the agent herself. Finally, there are future-oriented difficulties for attempts to apply such accounts of change to

⁷³ Here one might quibble: Suppose the coach currently said to have the most lifetime wins is revealed to have cheated. In that case, couldn’t the property of *coach with the most lifetime wins* be transferred back to someone else posthumously? I say no: The intuitions which would lead me to revoke the title of “most lifetime wins” from the current seeming bearer also lead me to think that the impostor coach never actually held the property *coach with the most lifetime wins* in the first place. So, there was no property transfer to begin with. And if such a property could be backwardly transferred to someone long dead, it appears to be a mere Cambridge change. And in which case we must find a better example to illustrate the above.

⁷⁴ More, too, will need to be said about how it avoids fatalist problems. For this understanding of atonement appears to land one immediately into problems addressed in Rea (2006) if one is to avoid the Neo-Quinean concern.

possible future persons, who at the time of the crucifixion have no relevant properties to transfer, which are addressed below.

In addition, the presentist has a further, Neo-Quinean difficulty with the above sort of understanding of property transfer. There cannot be things which do not exist. In order to have a property transferred to someone, then, that someone must exist. Most plausible presentist accounts offer something like haecceities or other properties to perform the relevant property-transfer work of the above examples.⁷⁵ Presentists who are committed to a transfer view must have an appropriate ontological stand-in.

The above applies more generally to views that require the existence of the relevant acts in order for payment to be made for them. If the negative consequences (penal or otherwise) of all of one's specific sins and all the specific sins of everyone who has existed or will exist were taken care of by Christ on the cross, presentism appears to falter. If presentism is true, it looks like Christ cannot have specifically taken on any particular sin of mine at the moment of the crucifixion, since neither I nor that sin existed yet.

Transfer views thus must address both important questions about how robust this transfer must be and what is ontologically required for a transfer of such robustness. According to transfer views, Christ takes something of ours upon himself (and perhaps vice versa). Is this transfer specific or general? The answer given here will constrain our temporal ontology, and vice versa, and leads us to a general taxonomy of transfer views.

Consider, again, a penal substitution view and the transfer therein: Christ pays for my sins. This payment could be specific, applying a particular payment for each of my particular sins, or it could be general. Is there a specific, say, "dollar amount" accounting for each individual sin, with separate accounts? Or is there a spiritual "blank check"?

The transfer of payment could thus work in two main ways: a token-token view and a type-token view.⁷⁶ On token-token views, for every

⁷⁵ See T. Crisp (2007).

⁷⁶ While the focus here is on moral transgression, the following discussion is also useful for Christus Victor accounts, according to which atonement requires defeat of certain principalities and powers. A similar type-token versus token-token discussion regarding the metaphysics of

individual sin that someone commits, Christ paid for that particular sin on the cross.⁷⁷ This view is captured nicely by the sentiment “Jesus died for your specific sins” or after an act of sin when a friend says, “Jesus paid particularly for that.”

Type-token views, on the other hand, do not require Christ to pay for each and every particular sin token that was committed—rather, on this understanding it is enough for Christ to have paid for each sin type (e.g., gluttony, adultery, lying, or perhaps even something much more general . . .).⁷⁸ Both presentists and eternalists can easily accommodate a type-token view of sin payment. But presentists appear to have a problem with token-token views that eternalists do not.

Presentists are unable to accept a token-token view according to which Christ’s payment of the penalty (or substitution) once on the cross for every single exact sin past, present, and future requires the existence of those acts. However, while the presentist cannot endorse token-token views which require existence of the individual and sins in question, the presentist can endorse a sort of token-token view. Token-token views, as it turns out, are of a broad family. It all depends on the nature of the property token in question.

If God has simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge of each of the individual sins each creature will commit, then God could transfer the penalty of each of those sins (or the relevant property that did or will attach to the creature—or perhaps just properties similar enough to ones that did or will exist) to Christ on the cross. If God knew what you would do, nothing would seem to prevent him from assigning to Christ the

atonement will also arise. For instance, does Christ’s victory through his death and resurrection require a specific defeat of *particular* principalities and powers? Are the defeated powers and principalities such that they all existed at the key moments of the atonement and were defeated at that time? If not, was a type-token victory, against any possible kind of principality or power enough? If the proper account requires a token-token view, did Christ have to defeat each token specifically, or did what he accomplished wipe out any potentially existing principality or power that could ever arise? How does this defeat fit with Christ’s sacrifice as given once and efficacious for all? Similar discussions regarding Christ’s sufferings and their completion (see Colossians 1:24) can also be applied to this framework.

⁷⁷ The atoning event on the cross is, of course, a token. Transfer views take this token event of Christ’s sacrifice to involve something additional in terms of properties—the question now is whether this additional work in terms of properties transferred is to be understood in terms of types or tokens.

⁷⁸ On this alternative, tokens are not directly paid for, but only indirectly paid for. Thanks to Dean Zimmerman for this point.

penalty for your sin, along with the penalties of the sins of all who do, did, or will exist. The existence of sin x thus does not seem required for the proper application of, say, penal consequences for x .

Another option available to presentists is to say that instead of accounting for each individual sin that *does* end up happening, Christ suffered the negative effects of every sin that *might* be committed (albeit in the form of experience of simulacra, the property of *guilt*, or punishment for sin). This particular type of answer also allows the presentist to deny that non-present objects and events need to exist in order for atonement to work. If Christ dies for every possible token of sin, then surely the ones you commit have been atoned for and we can also truly say that “Jesus died for your sin.” Understanding Christ’s payment in terms of such broad payment may, in fact, appear beneficial according to those who hold the view of unlimited atonement, wherein Christ atones for all sinners. Given the above, the following sin payment taxonomy can be established:⁷⁹

(6) *Type-Token Views*

(7) *Token-Token Views*

(7a) *Existence Requirement Views*: All of our sins exist, and Christ pays for each and every one of them—no more and no less.

(7b) *Pay It Backward and Forward View*: Though they may not have existed at the moment of payment (being either past or future), God knew all of the sins that were being, had been, or would be committed—and so Christ’s death pays for each one of them exactly.

(7c) *Saturation Views*: God knows all of the possible ways that any creature that could ever exist could ever sin and pays the price for all of those on the cross, just in case.

(7c*) *Future-Oriented Saturation*: Exact payment was given for past sins and those current to the time of the cross (since those occurred and were known), but saturation payment was given for any possible future sins.

⁷⁹ The taxonomies are stated in terms of payment for sin, but they can also be stated according to other conceptions of guilt and reparations (such as satisfaction or vicarious punishment theories). Language is limited to penal substitution only for ease of explication.

With the exception of (7a), presentists are able to adopt token-token views. But there are two problems with the presentist-friendly token-token accounts. First, it might be objectionably unjust to have such “overkill” accounts of the atonement as (7c) and (7c*), where Christ suffers unnecessarily—after all, on this picture, not all of Christ’s suffering was efficacious, since every sin token he died for does not match up with an actual sin that needs forgiveness. However, it seems that there is some over-payment built into most commonly accepted accounts of the atonement—there is not a one-to-one correspondence between sins that Christ died for and sins that are forgiven in a way that results in ultimate reconciliation. Unless one is a universalist (and thinks that all will be saved) or a Calvinist who believes in limited atonement, one must affirm that it is not the case that all sins paid for result in ultimate reconciliation. However, there seems to be a difference between paying for something that ultimately did not need to be paid for (e.g., what happens on the saturation views) and paying for something that needed to be paid for, but where the gift was rejected.

Second, one might question whether the presentist modifications of token-token accounts are acceptable on the grounds that they do not appear to properly take away *my* sin. Why should I care if a duplicate of my sin is removed or paid for? The presentist looks like she has a grounding problem—if the sinner no longer exists, how can their sin be paid for? Like other grounding problems and presentism, it is not clear that this is insurmountable, but it requires more discussion.⁸⁰

Here there is possibly tension between the two commitments of Neo-Quineanism and the substantivity intuition. There is thus more fruitful work to be done. However, there is enough to generate a useful taxonomy for how such transfer views can work and said taxonomy can be fruitfully applied to other accounts of atonement, as will be shown below. And here we can note that the eternalist has the advantage concerning the wider range of moves she can make regarding how atonement happens over time.

⁸⁰ Additionally, the presentist must provide an explanation of how the work accomplished via the token-token view substitution does not pass out of existence.

8. Solidarity Views and Stump's Account

Similar temporal questions and puzzles also arise for accounts which appear quite disparate. When we speak of the removal of sin and evil, there is the ontological removal of sin or sin events *as such* and then there is the removal of the consequences of that sin or evil: the weight, guilt, or psychic stain of evil and sin. It is a further question what is ontologically and theologically required for the removal of such a weight, guilt, or stain. Transfer views explore this in terms of property transfer. But another general approach to atonement theorizing—what I call solidarity views—faces similar sorts of temporal puzzles as those addressed previously. Given this, the earlier proffered taxonomy can, with some minor adjustments, be utilized in our understanding and debating these theories as well. The framework offered is thus broadly useful.

Solidarity views aim to provide a robust understanding of how Christ is able to sympathize with our weakness—Christ has seen and experienced life with us to the full extent that a sinless being can. By undergoing the crucifixion, death, and horrors generally, Christ removes an ontological obstacle preventing our union with God. The ontological obstacle is not simply due to our sins—there is something about our suffering and our response to suffering that is in need of deep repair that we cannot do ourselves.

Christ has important *de se* knowledge of our guilt and shame—in some theologically appropriate way, Christ knows *what it is like* to have such guilt and shame—and suffers in solidarity with us. While views such as penal substitution are concerned with reparations for sin, solidarity accounts provide an alternate way to make sense of the Hebrews 9:28a reference to Christ's being “offered once to bear the sins of many,” focusing on his *bearing of* the sins, rather than the offering.

What is it to bear sin? Certain transfer views assume that bearing sin requires some sort of payment, punishment, or reparation for sin. But this “bearing” might instead be some sort of mental sharing of the psychic weight of sin, which in turn allows sinners to turn toward God and away from their guilt and shame. Of course, certain sin payment and solidarity accounts need not be mutually exclusive. Due to the wide variety of metaphors and images used to describe what Christ's

crucifixion and death accomplished, one might think more than one account is needed.

According to solidarity accounts, the ontological gulf preventing our union with God is due in part to something previously lacking; God's solidarity with us provided us something we needed. Perhaps, as Eleonore Stump argues (2018), the issue lies in our inability to overcome our own guilt, shame, and the psychic stains of our sin. Christ's empathetic mental engagement with us offers us a way for this psychic weight of the stain of sin to be overcome. Or perhaps Christ defeats, redeems, and overcomes horrendous evils, as Marilyn McCord Adams argued (in her 1999 book and elsewhere). On this account, Adams famously suggested that we—sinful humans—might have a complaint or lament for having undergone suffering which needs to be addressed (2006). Through his suffering, Christ identifies and has solidarity with victims of evil and addresses such complaint and lament.⁸¹

Solidarity views thus offer more than mere moral exemplar views, although moral exemplar views do not entirely escape the previous temporal puzzles discussed.⁸² (For example: How was Christ's moral example to be followed or of benefit for those who lived and died pre-

⁸¹ I do not mean to suggest that Adams's and Stump's approaches are strictly opposed. Adams and Stump agree that part of our being at one with God involves redemption where suffering is ultimately made into something for the benefit of the individual undergoing the particular suffering. See Stump (2010, especially 393ff.). Adams goes further, particularly due to her focus on horrendous evils: "evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole" (1999, 26). For Adams, Christ's defeat of horrors is not merely due to the fact that someone's life turns out to be better on the whole; the evil is overcome in such a way that it becomes an integral part of an organic unity of overall goodness. The evil is organically part of a good whole and cannot be eliminated from that good whole (28–9). For both Adams and Stump, each individual sufferer and sinner will think that their existence is, on the whole, good. I am not the first to note the connection with solidarity; Rea discusses Adams's view in these terms in his (2019). Julian of Norwich likely also held some sort of solidarity view.

⁸² Indeed, the proponents of solidarity views mentioned take pains to avoid the unorthodox implications of a mere moral exemplar theory, as in Stump (2018, 167): "A position often attributed to Abelard and commonly considered heretical is the view that the point of Christ's passion and death is to teach by example what real love is. If this supposedly Abelardian position marks one end of the spectrum for interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement, the account I am delineating here marks the other end of the spectrum. On the Abelardian view, the point of Christ's passion is to set an example for human beings. On the account argued for here, the point of Christ's passion is to provide for human beings a metaphysical analogue of the union of the persons of the Trinity, in which each person is in the other."

Incarnation?) An important part of a solidarity view is our recognizing, interacting with, or somehow participating in something with Christ.

What is metaphysically required in order to have such recognition, interaction, and the like? Here again we encounter temporal puzzles, which are heightened to the extent we think such interaction happens during Christ's passion. For this reason, I will focus on Stump in what follows. (Adams's view will face questions and puzzles regarding *when* our lives are made right, et cetera: that is, questions akin to those asked in the "Consequence Removal Questions" section.)

Stump has offered a rich, appealing account of solidarity that provides the most metaphysical machinery, focusing particularly on what happens during Christ's passion. Thus, it raises the most immediate temporal puzzles, which can be addressed within the current framework.

Stump presents a "mind-reading" account.⁸³ According to Stump, in Christ's suffering on the cross,

Christ's human psyche is somehow joined with the psyches of every human being, then at one and the same time Christ will mind-read the mental states found in all the terribly evil human acts humans have ever committed... In this condition, Christ will have in his psyche a simulacrum of the stains of all the evil ever thought or done, without having any evil acts of his own.⁸⁴

Part of the work of Christ on the cross is that he has second-personal shared mental attention, that is, shared focus between individuals, with every creature that has or will exist, in order to be unified with us. This attention is robust and requires the existence of all human minds and Christ's attention to them during his passion: "...the psyches of all human beings pour into the human mind of Christ, which is open to them in his suffering and dying. This openness on Christ's part during

⁸³ The reader should note that Stump's account offers far more than just the shared attention material mentioned here. There is a deep richness in her account concerning the guilt and shame of sinners that needs to be removed. But if one finds even this tidbit of Stump's view attractive, one will have a difficult time being a presentist and adopting her view wholesale.

⁸⁴ Stump (2012a), formulated exactly in Rea (2019).

his crucifixion to allow all human psyches is his contribution of what is needed for mutual indwelling between God and human persons” (173–4).

Thus, Stump’s view appears to rule out almost all versions of presentism, requiring either eternalism or an extreme form of mind–body dualism, wherein all sinners not only exist at the time of the cross but are conscious to a robust enough level that they can be joined with Christ’s human psyche.⁸⁵ In order for Christ to join with the psyche of every human being, every human being must exist and have a psyche to which Christ can be joined.

However, a presentist who wants to avoid commitment to extreme mind–body dualism is not left without resources to try to account for something like Stump’s view. Examining the available options requires a brief exploration of the second-personal experiences and shared attention which are central to Stump’s account.

Second-personal experiences are experiences whereby one has direct experience of another person *as* a person. This often involves sharing attention—for example, two people mutually gazing into each other’s eyes. Such experiences show how persons can share attention with each other and be unified. Stump identifies the central obstacles to atonement with God as guilt (when we think that others do not desire our good) and shame (when we think that others reject not our good, but our very selves), which we experience because of our sin.⁸⁶ Christ’s second-personal experience of us and our psyches helps overcome the guilt and shame we experience due to sin: Christ’s joining his psyche with ours demonstrates that he does desire our good and wants to be united with us.

Stump’s conditions for second-personal experience might seem to rule out any second-personal experience of one who no longer or does not yet exist, since “One person Paula has a second-person experience of another person Jerome only if (1) Paula is aware of Jerome as a person (call the relation Paula has to Jerome in this condition ‘personal interaction’), (2) Paula’s personal interaction with Jerome is of a direct and

⁸⁵ Stump herself thinks her view is consistent with presentism due to her position on divine eternity. This will be discussed in the following section. For now, it is sufficient to note that there is at least a *prima facie* difficulty.

⁸⁶ Stump (2012b), 130 & (2010), 354.

immediate sort, and (3) Jerome is conscious.”⁸⁷ But Stump admits that what counts as being aware of someone “as a person” is not clear cut.⁸⁸

Stump says that thinking about another person is not enough to be aware of someone as a person, but interaction via email is. So, it is possible to be temporally removed in certain respects from someone with whom you have personal interaction of a direct and immediate sort. One can also have a second-person experience via a letter read after the author’s death. Stump admits that her consciousness requirement (i.e., (3) above), which seemed incredibly strict, does not require that the two people sharing personal interaction be conscious at the same time. What matters is that the author was conscious at the time they wrote the letter.

If reading a letter after someone’s death can count as a proper second-personal experience, then our lack of conscious awareness or non-existence at a particular time should not be an insurmountable obstacle to Christ’s having personal interaction with us on the cross. It depends on what is needed in order to have a personal interaction that is “of a direct and immediate sort.” Clearly, not every case of mediation of mental experience is unacceptable—direct and immediate awareness of another does not preclude communication mediated through written and spoken word. The question, then, is whether the mediation in question allows for the sort of awareness needed for second-personal experience (and is thus similar to email or a letter), or whether it is too far removed, like cases of third-party communication regarding a particular person.

The presentist is thus able to account for second-personal awareness over time generally, without any need for extreme mind–body dualism. However, second-personal awareness is only one of the conditions necessary for Stump’s account: shared attention is also required. It seems plausible to think that sharing attention requires the existence of all relevant parties—given Neo-Quineanism, if there is a relation, all *relata* must exist.

Here, too, though, there is some aid from Stump’s offered metaphysics. While Christ shares attention with us and our experiences, such sharing is not always of a direct and immediate sort. For there are certain

⁸⁷ Stump (2010), 75–6.

⁸⁸ Stump (2010), ch. 4, footnotes 72–4 for the following.

elements of our experience, such as knowing directly what it is like both to sin and to *want* to be the person who commits such a sin, that Christ cannot know directly. For Christ is without sin and cannot know this directly. But this is no obstacle to Christ's having the right sort of awareness of and attention to those particular pains. Christ is able to have the necessary solidarity with and attention to the stain of sin and related desires via mental simulacra. Christ, being and remaining sinless, experiences simulacra of the stains of all evil and this is enough to do the work.⁸⁹ Christ cannot experience the stain of sin itself, but Christ can experience it in a manner similar to experiences of empathetic pain.⁹⁰

If simulacra are sometimes sufficient for certain kinds of sharing, then perhaps a presentist can make broader use of simulacra generally in order to have an account in the spirit of Stump's. This could be done in the form of simulacra of either persons themselves or types or tokens of mental states.

Here is one such presentist gloss: Experiences of mere simulacra take the place of mind-reading. Instead of sharing joint attention, Christ experiences simulations of all of the mental states of all human persons who did, do, or will exist. In that way, Christ knows what it is like to be in the position of each individual, even though joint, shared attention at the time of the crucifixion would be impossible.⁹¹

Perhaps in this way Christ mentally "joins" us in our suffering. And perhaps this sort of experience would allow for a later "meeting of minds" between Christ and other humans, as Christ would have at one time paid mental attention to the same kind of things each human experienced.

One might rightly question whether this is enough.⁹² Simulacra of persons or general experiential content are certainly not as appealingly

⁸⁹ Though one must note that these simulacra comes about, for Stump, as a direct result of Christ's mind-reading the mental states involved in all evil human acts.

⁹⁰ Stump (2018), 161.

⁹¹ This can be further nuanced to account for all the possible mental states of those who *might* exist.

⁹² Kenny Boyce suggested in conversation that perhaps the presentist can say that the second person of the Trinity, throughout time, shares mental attention with those beings that exist, as they exist, so that by the end of time the Son will have experienced what it is like to be each human being. However, this violates the Hebrews 9:28 requirement that Christ's work on the cross be an offering that occurs only once.

robust as sharing attention with persons themselves. But it is hard to see how such mediation would be immediately unacceptable, given the earlier account of Christ's solidarity vis-à-vis the stain of sin. And the creation of simulacra of the mental states, such as of those who died pre-crucifixion, would not be the result of their own efforts but would instead be the work of God. The particular nature of such simulacrum would depend on one's particular account.

But perhaps one thinks the simulacra of the events Christ attends to must have already happened—otherwise, our conscious experience is not suitably responsible for the simulacra to which Christ attends second-personally. After all, letters must first be authored before one is able to have a direct second-personal experience via reading them.

However, if God has simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge, God knows what we will do and experience. Given this, why not think that a simulacrum of a mental experience to come could function in the same way as reading a letter from the past? If mediation via letter is acceptable, it is hard to see why such simulacra of future mental states would be unacceptable. Both sorts of simulacra would come from the same source—God—and in each case God knows exactly what the relevant experiences were or will be due to what the agent herself is like and chooses. Thus, robust shared attention between Christ on the cross and all persons throughout time is not necessary in order for Christ to gain a deep understanding of each person and demonstrate that he desires their best and wants to be united to them—the heart of Stump's account.

If such simulacra accounts are acceptable, a taxonomy of second-personal experience and interaction parallel to the transfer view's taxonomy is available (with the same basic moves available to the presentist, *mutatis mutandis*):

- (8) *Type-Token Views of Personal Experience*: Christ experiences, on the cross, certain general kinds of conscious experience—either via those who currently existed at that time or simulacra—to appropriately understand, for every particular token experience, what it is like to have undergone that token experience.
- (9) *Token-Token Views of Personal Experience*

- (9a) *Existence Requirement Token Views*: All of our conscious experiences exist, and, on the cross, Christ’s human psyche is joined with the psyche of every human, with Christ mind-reading the mental states of every human and experiencing a simulacrum of all the evil that exists—no more, no less.
- (9b) *“Read It” Backward and Forward Views*: Though they may not have existed at the moment of mind-reading (being either wholly past or future), God knew all of the mental states that existed at the moment(s) of the crucifixion, had existed, or would exist—and so Christ mind-reads the mental states concurrent with the cross and experiences a simulacrum of all other mental states and of all the evil that existed at the cross, had existed, or would exist.
- (9c) *Saturation Views*: God knows all of the possible experiences any creature that could ever exist could ever have, and so Christ experiences simulacra of those and all possible evils on the cross, just in case.
- (9c*) *Future-Oriented Saturation*: Christ experiences simulacra of all mental states that had existed, mind-reads mental states concurrent with the cross, and experiences simulacra of all possible future mental states (along with experiencing simulacra of past evil, evil present at the time of the cross, and all possible future evil).

One issue appears to be whether Christ can be properly considered to be participating in *personal* interaction on (9c) and (9c*), since Christ experiences simulacra that end up having no human person who ever identifies with them and claims them as simulacra of her own experience. By itself, this doesn’t appear to be a problem: Personal interactions require another and sometimes attempts fail. Some letters, for example, never reach a recipient.

Additionally, the presentist inherits a grounding problem similar to the grounding problem regarding certain “overkill” transfer views—it appears that Christ does not properly share *my* experience, but instead experiences a qualitative duplicate.⁹³ And it is important to Stump that

⁹³ Importantly, in Stump’s account, the simulacrum of the stain of evil that Christ has comes about as a direct result of Christ’s mind-reading. Thus, the simulacrum Christ has does not detach or float free from actual human experience.

the human psyche of Christ is, on the cross, *joined* to the psyche of every human.⁹⁴ This is what makes it so that Christ is truly sharing in our experience (though not completely, as Christ can only experience a simulacrum of the stain of evil). While one can have second-personal experience of someone after they have ceased to exist, certain shared experiences require robust consciousness and awareness of the other person.⁹⁵

There is a way of putting pressure on this requirement, however, utilizing the framework Stump has offered. Suppose one has a remote conversation, perhaps by video, with someone who continually goes into and out of existence.⁹⁶ On a strict reading of shared attention, this will not count as a case of shared, joint attention between two parties. But it seems we have something near enough for a good, shared conversation and attention therein. (One can even heighten the case by having the parties both pop into and out of existence, never existing at the same time.)

Cases of such temporally staggered attention may be enough to allow us to reap the robust benefits of Stump's view. For while Christ is aware of all persons and their suffering during the crucifixion, all existing persons are not so aware of him—there is at least not mutual awareness of the shared attention. And said awareness of Christ's experiencing *with us* is what psychologically allows us to overcome our guilt and shame. This psychological awareness and overcoming (of course, by God's grace) can happen at different moments in time. All that is needed for our intrinsic change, including conscious awareness, can happen at later moments in time.⁹⁷

Here Stump may complain that I am pressing distinctions she avoids on her account. Stump thinks she can have both presentism and true shared attention at the moments of the crucifixion, thus escaping the above grounding problems. Additionally, she thinks that there is the right sort of mutual awareness of the shared attention, even if my

⁹⁴ Stump (2012a) & Rea (2019). ⁹⁵ Stump (2010), ch. 6.

⁹⁶ Thanks to Dean Zimmerman for this example.

⁹⁷ Notably, even the most robust notions of intrinsic change due to atonement, such as being joined to another object such as redeemed humanity (O. Crisp, 2009) do not require my being immediately aware of such intrinsic change or joining.

awareness of the sharing occurs millennia after Christ's passion. My speaking of "later moments" is thus inapt. Stump thinks she can accomplish all of this by utilizing her account of divine eternity, according to which earlier and later moments in our timeline are simultaneous to God. If this is the case, the above taxonomy, while interesting, is not necessary for making her account consistent with a variety of temporal views. I now turn to this account.

9. Divine Eternity

Stump & Kretzmann present an account of divine and human temporality wherein God, as eternal, has "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."⁹⁸ This illimitable life is a timeless mode of duration, such that everything (including all events in human history) are present to God. In addition to this limitless duration, God does not experience temporal succession, wherein events are either past, present, or future or even occur temporally earlier or later than each other.⁹⁹ From God's perspective, my writing this chapter, your reading this sentence, and Washington's crossing the Delaware are all simultaneous. Stump and Kretzmann label this simultaneity for God "'ET-simultaneity', for 'simultaneity between what is eternal and what is temporal'."¹⁰⁰

Humans, on the other hand, experience temporal succession—events are such that they are future, become present, and then move into the past. From the non-eternal, human perspective, you are reading this sentence in the present, and my writing it and Washington's crossing the Delaware are in the past.

According to Stump, "The logic of the doctrine of eternity has the result that every moment of time, as that moment is *now* in time, is ET simultaneous with the eternal life of God."¹⁰¹ The difference between

⁹⁸ Stump & Kretzmann (1981), 431.

⁹⁹ Stump (2018), 119. She writes, "Because an eternal God cannot have succession in his life, neither of the series (the so-called 'A series' or 'B series') characteristic of time can apply to God's life or to God's relations with other things. That is, nothing in God's life can be past or future with respect to anything else, either in God's life or in time; and, similarly, nothing in God's life can be earlier or later than anything else either" (119).

¹⁰⁰ Stump (2018), 119.

¹⁰¹ Stump (2018), 119, emphasis Stump.

divine and human temporal experience is analogous to the difference in experience of the spatial dimension that would exist between someone living in only two dimensions (a “flatlander”) and someone who lives in three.¹⁰² The nature of reality does not change, though the perspectives are different. A flatlander moving along a line would regard some of the line as behind her and some of the line as before her. But the three-dimensional person would see the whole line before her all at once. Given divine eternity, God’s present awareness of the mental states of all those who exist, existed, or will exist need not be mediated via one point on the timeline. God is thus able to have interactions with multiple humans existing at different times.

According to the divine eternity account, what is present depends on whether one is divine or merely human. There is no single, objective answer to the question “What is present?” since what is present depends on one’s mode of duration.¹⁰³ And there are two modes of duration—timeless and temporal. Admitting that “present” is a relative matter, however, does not make it so that one has introduced a theory of time over and above presentism and eternalism.¹⁰⁴

Divine eternity appears to require an eternalist spacetime block universe, albeit in terms which describe God’s illimitable life in relation to it. For God sees everything: from our perspective, everything that is, was, or will be. While our sins may be in our past, they are always present to God. Everything that ever happened or will happen is present to God. And if something is present to God, it must exist, full stop—especially given our Neo-Quinean commitments.

Someone who wants to resist the move from divine eternity to eternalism must surrender a commitment to Neo-Quineanism and the univocal use of the universal and existential quantifiers. One could maintain that if an object *O* is present to God, it must exist *in eternity*. But it may nevertheless not exist—because “exist” in our mouths, in normal

¹⁰² Niven (1967) & Stump (2018), 120.

¹⁰³ Stump explicitly appeals to “modes of duration” in describing the theory (119).

¹⁰⁴ Other (eternalist) approaches that argue for multiple, differing true tense claims according to which there is not a single objective standpoint by which the question “What is present?” can be answered include Fine’s fragmentalism (2006).

contexts, is restricted in scope to what presently exists. To use this to resist eternalism, one must say that there are two equally good quantifier meanings which we can shift between, and there is nothing more real about the things in a particular domain.

But this position pays an ontological cost in addition to those which accompany a surrender of Neo-Quineanism. For this position maintains that God, in some important sense, is not the final word or arbiter of reality or what exists. Many theists will want to maintain that, if push comes to shove, God's perspective or quantifier should take ontological privilege. And given the ontological gulf required to make this position work, it is also unclear how we could refer to those things in the domain of God's quantifier and vice versa.

The other way of understanding the difference in the use of "exists," between normal contexts and those of the ontology room, is simply in terms of restricting the domain of the quantifier in ordinary contexts. All of these things *exist*, but only some of them are present. And we normally only refer to what is present. But to say this, as Sider (2001) points out,¹⁰⁵ is simply to hold an eternalist view. We can speak of the sum total of things in the domain—which includes what is present to God, that is, all objects, events, and times—but restrict in other contexts. By my lights, the divine eternity account thus turns out to be a particular version of eternalism, even though Stump does not think it is. Thus, any account of atonement which utilizes divine eternity must surrender either presentism or Neo-Quineanism.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ pp. 15ff. Stump (2018) resists this move, because she conflates a non-dynamic four-dimensional block (which is frequently labeled 'B-theoretic eternalism') with succession. But succession and temporal experience are different than temporal ontology *simpliciter*, for example, see McTaggart (1998). An example Stump uses involving a yellow point versus an illuminated line of "now" (120) might require quantifier variance or fragmentalism, if there's a commitment to there being two objective, differing "nows."

¹⁰⁶ There remain interesting questions about the nature of the Son's experience of time as an incarnate being on earth. The divine eternity account might be particularly suited to helping address these issues, along with exploring how temporal experience may or may not be a fundamental aspect of human experience. Unpacking Christ's relationship to time will help clarify our temporal commitments. Those who do not utilize divine eternity—such as presentists—might have other advantages. Perhaps this is one aspect of the Incarnation that is less mysterious, as the Son's experience of time is the same as ours: There is simply no other way for it to be, post-creation.

10. Eternalist A-Theory to the Rescue?

In raising the question of what counts as present, the divine eternity account helps bring to the fore a crucial, unargued-for assumption that has been lurking throughout the discussion. Thus far I have assumed (for ease of explication) that since eternalism maintains that the objects and events from every time exist, there was no privileged time or set of times. While there exists a timeline in which events are ordered from earlier to later (called a B-series), talk about the past, present, or future is not objective. The term “present” is as much an indexical as the term “here.” Thus, I assumed that, according to the eternalist, all objects and events enjoy the same ontological status.

But not all eternalists are B-theorists. While the above assumption is adopted by the majority of eternalists, some think that the existence of all objects and events from all times does not mean that these objects and events exist *just* as we do. For we have a property that grants us an objective, ontological privilege that objects at other times do not have—being present. These eternalists posit an A-series: “a series of positions that runs from the far past to the near past to the present, and then from the present to the near future to the far future, or conversely.”¹⁰⁷ On an eternalist A-theory, all objects, events, and times exist—but time is also dynamic, so that objects and times are objectively future, become objectively present, and then pass into the objective past. While all objects exist, only some are objectively present. The present can be envisioned as a sort of “spotlight” that moves across spacetime, “lighting” things up as it goes along. Objects, events, and times that were “lit up” are past, while those yet to be “lit” are future.¹⁰⁸

The A-theory allows for the ontological privileging of some objects and events over others, while eternalism guarantees the existence of all objects that are, were, and ever will be. Thus, according to an eternalist A-theory, while past sins exist, they do not have the same ontological status as what is present. Non-present sins exist, and thus can serve as a

¹⁰⁷ McTaggart (1998), 68. Broad (1923) articulates, but rejects, this view. Contemporary supporters of eternalist A-theory include Cameron (2015) and Sullivan (2012).

¹⁰⁸ Zimmerman (2008), 213.

ground for, say, an existence requirement view of sin payment or an existence requirement solidarity view. Exact sins can be forgiven and paid for; exact conscious states can be utilized. But the addition of the A-theory makes it so that the continued existence of those sins need not be worrisome—sins in the past are not as real as the present.¹⁰⁹ Unlike B-theoretic eternalism, according to which past moments of sin and suffering have the same ontological status as the joy of the saints in heaven, eternalist A-theorists say that while past sin and suffering exist, they have lesser ontological status than the joys experienced in heaven will have, come the eschaton. The continued existence of past sins is not as great a blight on reality as the continually existing sins of a traditional B-theoretic eternalism.

Eternalist A-theory thus attempts to get the best of both worlds—something intuitively near enough to an *Evil Elimination* approach (since the ontological status of sins and evil is somehow lessened, though they are not completely eradicated) *and* the ability to adopt existence requirement views of atonement (since, for example, each sin exists and thus is able to be paid for). What an eternalist A-theory is able to accomplish, however, depends on the ontological specifics of the privileged present. What is the benefit, or what follows from, being objectively present?

One approach is simply to assume that nothing more follows than simply being objectively present. Time is fundamentally dynamic, and the only ontological difference between times (and the objects and events therein) is whether they are objectively past, present, or future.¹¹⁰ However, if this is the case, the benefit(s) of being objectively present are at best unclear. If there is nothing more to dynamic time, than A-theory eternalism appears to have no advantage over the B-theoretic approach—especially regarding the *Evil Elimination* approach.

¹⁰⁹ Thanks to Meghan Sullivan for suggesting this view. Eternalist A-theorists differ with respect to exactly how past and future objects and events are not as real as those that are present. The language of “not as real” is borrowed and need not suggest degrees of being.

¹¹⁰ This is the view of the growing block that Broad (1923) endorsed. The past is just as real as the present; it is simply not present (66). This view of dynamic time can also be adopted by the eternalist.

This view also inherits a problem that David Braddon-Mitchell (2004) and Trenton Merricks (2006) raise for the growing block theory of time: How do I know that I am objectively present? On the above A-theory, it subjectively *seems* to me that I am in the objective present, but it would seem that way to me regardless of whether I am. I think to myself, “I am sitting here at the present time.” Or pick an intensely felt moment of my suffering or sinning. I think, “I am suffering now.” There is no ontological difference between these conscious states and those in the objective present, except that the earlier ones lack the primitive property *being present*.¹¹¹ When these moments have objectively passed, I will still be thinking these things to myself—at these past times, it will seem to me that I am in the present. Even more problematic for our purposes, I will still be vividly and intensely feeling the experience of my suffering or sin. Thus, this view cannot allow for *Evil Elimination*, and the concerns that motivate the desire for *Evil Elimination* remain.

The growing block theorist is not left without a reply to Merricks, nor, *mutatis mutandis*, is the eternalist A-theorist. Peter Forrest (2004) proposes the Dead Past Hypothesis: Conscious experiences and certain kinds of events (like an explosion) are activities and *require* objective presentness (359). Forrest uses this to defend the growing block theory and says that being on the present edge of reality is what allows for activity, but the Dead Past Hypothesis can be expanded to the Dead Past and Future Hypothesis (DPFH) for the eternalist A-theory.¹¹² Objectively past and future people cannot think, sin, or suffer.

The eternalist A-theorist endorsing the DPFH then must explain the differences between the past and future, as opposed to the present. And therein lie difficulties, regardless of whether the past and future are more or less ontologically robust. The more robust the existence of non-

¹¹¹ And the other relevant primitive properties that also follow, such as *being past*.

¹¹² Cameron (2015) agrees with Forrest that only present beings are conscious (23–4). However, Cameron does not think this solution solves the epistemic problem (28–9). He also thinks that a merely past person, such as Caesar, is dramatically different than present beings: “Caesar is now *completely* different from how he used to be: not only is he not conscious, but he no longer has any of the ordinary properties we think relevant to something’s being conscious . . . his being a certain height, mass, and having certain neural firings in his brain, etc., are merely ways things were, and they are no part of how reality is” (50). As will be discussed below, a view like this will be functionally similar to the presentist approaches.

present things is, the more the existence of past sin and evil appears threatening.

One problem that both the presentist and eternalist A-theorist share is that Christ's salvific death is not as ontologically robust as what is present (though both can affirm the continuing salvific effects, and for the eternalist this is only a matter of degree). Both can attempt to explain why this is not a problem, due to the continuing causal effects of the cross versus the non-continuing effects of past sin. The existence of Christ's sacrifice is enough to do some salvific work.

The eternalist A-theorist who accepts the DPFH also shares with the presentist the inability to adopt certain versions of Stump's account: Those which require that the conscious states of persons atoned for be in the domain of existence at the time of the crucifixion. More robust versions of joint attention will preclude this sort of eternalist A-theorist along with the presentist.

Eternalist A-theory, though, can attempt to affirm both that the sacrifice of Christ needed to exist, *simpliciter*, in order for there to be any forgiveness and that the pre-Incarnation faithful were forward-looking, having not received the full benefit of promises to come. For when those pre-Incarnation were present, the sacrifice of Christ existed but was in the future. Their sins could be forgiven, since Christ's sacrifice existed, but the full promise—Christ's being with us—was not yet present. However, this view has the consequence that the more efficacious the work of Christ is in this particular manner (when non-present), the more past and future sin and evil has its mark on reality.¹¹³ Eternalist A-theory, then, does not provide obvious help regarding the forgiveness of persons who existed pre-crucifixion over and above solutions available to either the presentist or B-theoretic eternalist.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ To say otherwise, and ontologically privilege positive events at a time but not negative events at that same time, will land us back in the territory of Lebens and Goldschmidt. For this would require that positive events remain in a way that negative events do not and must then make use of something like their hypertime strategy of eliminating evil from existence.

¹¹⁴ Note the eternalist A-theorist's ability to use a token-token existence requirement view of sin payment is not affected. For all an existence requirement view needs is that the exact sins, et cetera, *existed*. In the case of Christ's sacrificial work, noting that the sins in question *will* be paid for is not enough if Christ's *work* on the cross is supposed to do something for the sinner. But on this picture, Christ's work, though it exists, appears just as efficacious as it is for the presentist—the sins will have reparations made for them, but those reparations are not present. There may

So, the eternalist A-theorist faces a dilemma: If the present is ontologically privileged to the extent that the existence of past suffering and sin is ontologically so non-robust as to approach the advantages of *Evil Elimination*, then the account will rule out conscious experiences in the past and future and cannot utilize theories which require them. If conscious experience is not reserved only for those who are present, then there will be conscious experience of sin and suffering at other times even as the saints rejoice in heaven post-eschaton. And this is precisely one of the problems of B-theoretic eternalism that the A-theory tries to avoid. So, while the eternalist A-theorist is able to combine some of the benefits of the other two theories, she is unable to claim the full benefits of either.

The eternalist A-theory was introduced in an effort to provide a middle way between presentists and eternalists. However, the view appears to suffer from weaknesses of both accounts. Presentists will not be pleased that sin and evil still exist according to the view. But if the eternalist A-theorist emphasizes how little ontological significance past sins and sufferings have in the present, then she is in danger of losing advantages provided by ontologically robust existing things, such as the moment of atonement or conscious states. The eternalist A-theorist can still retain the effects of Christ's sacrifice, but so, too, can the presentist. At minimum, positing an eternalist A-theory does not allow one to bypass the issues.

However, one notable advantage of the eternalist A-theory is the ability to minimize the effects of past sin while adopting an existence token-token view of sin payment. It is unclear whether this (or the theory) ultimately helps matters, but it is another option worthy of exploration.

11. A Continuing Eucharist?

However, the presentist and eternalist A-theorist may attempt to retain benefits of a robustly existing atoning event by questioning the earlier

be advantages here, which merits further exploration, but they are not readily apparent: for instance, the mere existence of a non-robust atoning event does not appear to secure the fulfillment of promises of forgiveness in a way that allows for an obvious advantage over presentism. For presentists can also say that the cross was going to happen (even determinately at a particular point in time, if they wanted to), and can thereby secure the promises of forgiveness as well.

notion of the atonement happening “all at once.” To do so, they will need a strong view of the sacraments: A potential way out is to maintain that Christ’s redemptive work on the cross, unlike sins which are here today and gone tomorrow, is continually carried out via the Church’s continued participation in the Eucharist. Christ’s sacrificial work never becomes past, as the Church has carried the salvific work continually in the present.

At first glance, this appears to violate the condition that Christ is offered once and only once. In the continual practice of the Eucharist, is not Christ continually sacrificed? No: One can hold that the Eucharist is the continuing of a single act of Christ’s ongoing sacrifice that began on the cross. There are several things to note here. First, this requires an unusual understanding of what is considered to be a single act, particularly if the act is to be continuous. Second, Christ’s ongoing sacrifice, even with a robust understanding of the Eucharist, does not appear to be continuous: It seems highly implausible that the Eucharist would have been practiced in the interim period between Christ’s death and resurrection, let alone continuously in the early Church. If the Eucharist had not been offered in the interim, it would appear that Christ was offered at least twice—once on the cross and once at the first Eucharist after the Resurrection (three times, if you count the Last Supper). Perhaps, instead, the act simply needs to be continuing, rather than continuous. However, this will face concerns about what counts as a single act.¹¹⁵ Third, this understanding may not do justice to the last words of Christ: “It is finished.”¹¹⁶ One can interpret Christ to be speaking solely about the end of his human life, but that ignores the surrounding texts in which Christ says things to fulfill the scriptures. Perhaps, though, Christ’s last words on the cross were correct—the salvific work of reparations was finished, but something sacrificial related to the event, such as Christ’s sacrificial blood, need continually exist (and it does so via the Eucharist).

¹¹⁵ This could occur if events can be temporally gappy or scattered. (Thanks to Alicia Finch for this point.) However, if events can be temporally gappy, the gappy event need not involve the Eucharist: perhaps it is something else that most every theorist can utilize. This is worth further exploration.

¹¹⁶ John 19:30.

The above account of the Eucharist may not be popular, but it does demonstrate that B-theoretic eternalism need not be the only way to say that the act of atonement (and not just its effects) continually exists. It also raises a further possibility for presentism: If the event of Christ's sacrifice or some element of it did not stop, it solves some of the earlier difficulties regarding cross-time relations and the coexistence of Christ's act and the effects on us. As of now, though, the particulars of the account are not clear, and so it is not apparent whether or not this sort of move works. But if one is attracted to presentism or an eternalist A-theory but thinks that the act of atonement still needs to exist, this is a route worthy of exploration.

12. Taking Stock

There is much more to be said about these topics, and certain seemingly simple or easy answers are unavailable. Answers which appeared to give simplistic solutions turned out to offer anything but ontological ease: for they involved commitment to things like extreme mind–body dualism. And certain overly simplistic views of atonement, used to object to either presentism or eternalism, failed in large part due to issues with those views themselves. For example, in what sense is Christ's death "once for all"? A wooden reading of this condition, in terms of a property swap at a single time, for example, might initially appear to rule out presentism—but such a reading appears to be incoherent.

There are at least several ways of interpreting such conditions, leading to different ontological options: either in terms of distinctions made, available views in a taxonomy, or even, ultimately, temporal ontologies themselves. Importantly, the temporal questions, distinctions, and taxonomies introduced above must be dealt with despite differing accounts of the atonement, such as transfer views and solidarity theories. One cannot remain neutral with respect to the ontological options. While the answers one can give will vary depending on one's view of time or one's preferred atonement theory, there is no way to avoid these temporal questions entirely—at least, not if one is to offer a complete theory.

Neither presentists nor eternalists can, at this point, claim to better fit the proper account of the atonement, largely due to disagreement regarding what is required for a proper account of the atonement. However, presentism and eternalism have been used to highlight and aid in choice points regarding what an atonement account can and should look like. Presentism may have advantages if one wants an *Evil Elimination* view, or theories which focus on the elimination of evil and sin; Eternalism, on the other hand, allows for broad token-token views (in terms of both property transfer and mind-reading) and many other theoretical options.¹¹⁷

One final complication, however, must be addressed. There appears to be tension in the scriptural metaphors regarding the forgiveness and removal of sin with which we began this conversation. Isaiah 44:22 says, “I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you,” while Acts 3:19 declares, “Repent therefore, and turn to God *so that your sins may be wiped out*” (emphasis mine). Isaiah indicates that sin has already been taken care of, while Acts indicates that something more is needed in order to wipe out sin.

This calls into question some of the fundamental assumptions of this chapter. First, I had assumed that the major work of forgiveness and reparation for sin were accomplished on the cross regardless of whether people are repentant. Second, it was tacitly assumed that the mechanics of the atonement did not vary by people group—if there is a required order to the atonement (e.g., forgiveness, then repentance), that order is the same for everyone.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Though the latter is a limited sort of advantage—it offers more options, and thus allows for someone to choose among a group of potentially attractive views. But at the end of the day, only one of the competing options (e.g., type-token versus token-token views) will be true. And it may very well be that the true theory is consistent with presentism.

¹¹⁸ One might think that while the mechanics of the atonement do not vary by people group or person, messages communicated to humans about atonement might vary due to the unique and particular point of the cross in eschatological history. Before Christ, things regarding the atonement were by their very nature “forward looking,” whereas now we are “backward looking.” But the above verses are not what one might expect on this sort of picture, since the message of currently existing forgiveness was to a pre-Christ Israel (though one might think that such forgiveness could be given because of what Christ would do), and the need for repentance in order to have forgiveness was addressed to an audience post-resurrection, while making use of prophetic passages from pre-Christ Israel.

One can account for the consistency of these scriptural metaphors by saying the imagery applies to different steps of atonement: say, reparations and repentance. If one finds the previous discussion in this chapter regarding the Temporal Question of atonement convincing, such seeming tension is solved with the appropriate distinctions and framework. Simile and metaphor are malleable; an image used in one context need not communicate the same content as the same image used in another context.

However, one might read these two statements as indicating that the major salvific act can occur at more than one time, thus dropping the constraint that the atoning work of Christ happen only once, on the cross. If so, then our theoretical options widen considerably. Presentists, for example, will be able to utilize certain previously unavailable existence requirement token-token views. The presentist may say that individual sins are paid for as they happen, that Christ shares relevant mental attention with each person when they exist, and that Christ's atoning sacrifice is present and real in a way that sin is not, since Christ's sacrifice is always happening.

One should be careful, though, when dealing with imagery and metaphor, to interpret the more poetic by means of the less poetic. One cannot read 1 Peter 3:18 ("Christ suffered for our sins once for all, the just for the unjust") as rejecting the one-time constraint without doing violence to the text, whereas "sweeping away" and "blotting out" can be interpreted more loosely. While there are many ontological options available for consideration, our theorizing can be helpfully constrained by the texts themselves, which also deserve further study.

Where should the conversation go from here? I recommend we aim for reflective equilibrium between what we take to be the proper theory of time and how we understand the atonement. The previous discussion offers tools, by way of providing distinctions and taxonomies and also in highlighting areas in need of further exploration. I thus end with the hope that there will be such exploration: further detailed work is needed in order to make sense of these issues.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Thanks to the 2012 Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion reading group, the 2012 Baylor-Georgetown-Notre Dame Philosophy of Religion conference, Kenny Boyce, Jonathan Jacobs, Erik Johnson, Jon Kvanvig, Carl Mosser, Faith Pawl, Tim Pawl, Luke Potter,

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