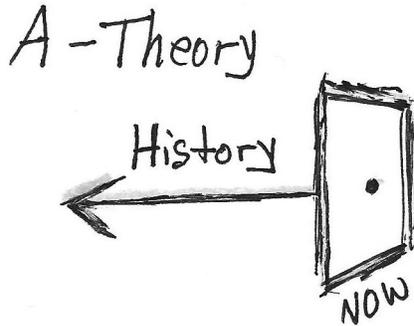


Two prevalent theories of Time

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A-Theory (Process Theory, or Tensed Theory)



There is such a thing as *NOW*. It is a privileged temporal location. When an event passes from *now* and becomes history, it no longer exists nor can anybody go back to it.

In this theory, God is changing. He stands in relation to a changing reality. He answers prayer *after* the request is made.

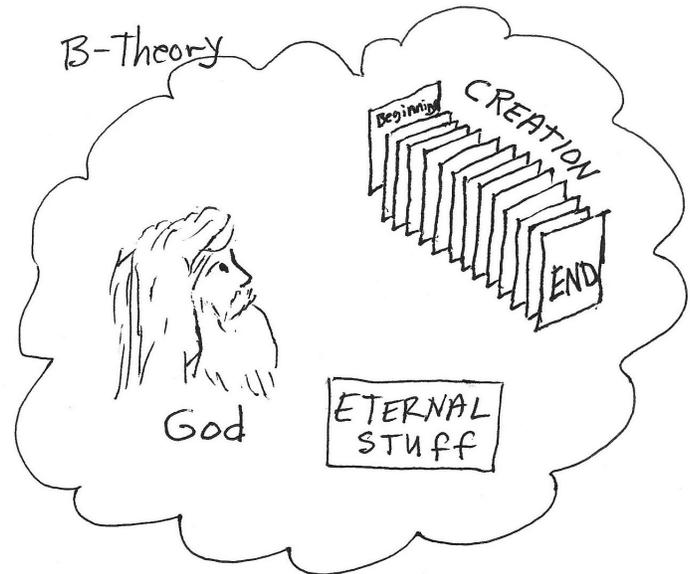
In this theory, the past exists in memory. The Now is about to become the past. The future is full of possibilities.

God existed yesterday, exists today and will exist tomorrow.

To distinguish this view from B-Theory, we describe God as *changing, temporal* and *everlasting*.

Scriptures presenting God as having history: many, for example
Exodus 3-4
also: Isaiah 5; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 11

B-Theory (Stasis Theory, or Tenseless Theory)



Time is a created thing. God put us in it. There is no real place in time called *now*. It exists only in minds that are in Time. God does not understand the temporal perception of *now*. God is immutable (unchanging) and timeless.

God exists yesterday, today and tomorrow.

To distinguish this view from A-Theory, we describe God as *immutable, atemporal* and *eternal*.

Scriptures supporting divine atemporality:

Psalm 90
2 Peter 3:8
John 8:58

Scriptures supporting immutability:

Malachi 3:6
Psalm 102:27
James 1:17

Questions:

On Anthropomorphisms: It's clear how we are to interpret obvious divine anthropomorphisms (God's arm, God's ear) but how are we to interpret divine descriptions that are not so obviously anthropomorphic (God's anger)?

What is Scripture telling us about God when God remembers (Gen 9:15), anticipates (Is 5; Jer 3:6-7, 19-20), reflects (Prov 5:21), ponders (Exodus 13:17) and decides (Rom 1:26; 1 Cor 1:27-28)?

Does "In the beginning...." imply there was a first event?

1 Samuel 23:10-11 – unfulfilled prophecy?

Here are some responses to the Scriptures above that seem to support atemporality and immutability.

Psalm 90 and 2 Peter 3:8. On telescoping time. Both the Psalm and the 2 Peter verse present time as relative to God. That is, what seems like ages to us are mere moments to God. For these passages to successfully support atemporality they would have to say something like "Time is meaningless to You. In an instant you hear and answer my prayers while you visit Adam in the Garden of Paradise." or something like that. These passages say that time moves forward for both man and God; but for God, the forward motion of time is relative.

Psalm 90:2. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (NRSV). Examination of this verse shows the same thing - that time is one directional... from the past to the future. In fact, it mentions God's experience "before" the creation, which implies that time was in operation even "before" creation. If there is no time "outside" creation then it should say "outside" instead of "before."

John 8:58 uses the term "I Am." To claim "I Am" to mean "timeless" (rather than everlasting) is a tall order. If what Jesus meant is "I exist every-when, even before Abraham" then He couldn't have said it any other way. If, on the other hand, He was simply making a claim of divinity, He also said it very well and the term "before" connotes one-directional time.

Malachi 3:6 says that God is unchanging; but does the prophet mean that God is eternally static or that God is consistent in character? It is obviously the latter. His point is this. The reason the Jews are still around is because of God's promise to Abraham. God is true to his covenant while Israel is unfaithful. God has removed His presence from them; but (vs. 7) He is anxious to return to them if they will "Return to me..." Notice that there is a sequence (in time) of events. If the people return to God, God will return to them. Man acts (free will) and God reacts (changes in response to the new reality).

Psalm 102:27 God does not grow old and weak. He remains strong. He doesn't die like creatures do. This verse does not support strict immutability. Furthermore, having "no end" connotes an everlasting existence rather than a static everything-at-once eternity.

James 1:17 This verse continues the point made in James 1:12-16. God will reward the one who endures temptation. God tempts no one. Temptation comes from within the man, not from God. Righteousness comes from God, "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (or, shadow of turning)." This description speaks to God's consistency of character and perfect awareness (rather than His existence experience). He will NEVER tempt anyone and he sees all - both righteousness and sin. Nothing is hidden from Him... neither secret sins nor secret acts of giving.