Everywhen: Examining Omnipresence

on the Limited Human Perception of Space and Time

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This is about human limitations

Specifically:

• Human perception of TIME is very limited

• God’s perception of time is NOT limited

• This mismatch gets in the way of human understanding of God.
Omnipresence

• God is everywhere … widely agreed
• God is every\textit{when} … what does that mean?

• Perceiving all time (past, present, future) in a unified way is beyond human comprehension.

• Human \textit{experience} says that “time marches on”
  • Absolute, One-directional, Irreversible

• But that is \textit{our} problem, not God’s
Start with basic scientific principle:
  - Nature makes sense

Physics (including theory of relativity) relies on certain very basic mathematical principles.

Foremost principle is symmetry

Symmetry in math is a form of beauty

When mathematical symmetry describes nature, it is “correct”

It is an article of faith to believe in symmetry
Time and space in physics

• In the equations of relativity, space and time appear in a symmetric way.
  – via theory of relativity, you can transform space into time (and vice-versa)
  – experimental observations confirm this theory

• We conclude the theory is correct

• But there is no direct human experience of this space-time equivalence
Relativity

• Never say “absolutely certain” about science, but … this is a very good theory.

• High comfort level
  • sound reasoning
  • observational confirmation

• Relativity says: space and time comprise a four-dimensional manifold.

• Therefore, treat them in a unified way.
God’s perception of space-time

• Basic principle of any religious person:  
  – God understands any human theory

• So God comprehends space & time in a unified way

• God’s omnipresence extends to time as well as space.
How does God comprehend time?

- Nobody knows
- If someone did know, how could they convey the idea?
- Barriers:
  - language
  - everyday experience
  - thought structure
- These barriers comprise a human limitation
- Math expressions $\rightarrow$ words? Hard to do!
Another basic principle:

Never underestimate God

• Acknowledge human limitations
  – Physicists sometimes make mistakes
    • Example: Hawking’s “Brief History of Time”

• Be happy with incremental progress
  • God gave us the ability to reason
  • Reason takes us beyond sensory perception
  • Mathematics leads us to new discoveries
  • Space and time are equivalent

• Remain humble before God
Beyond comprehension

• A common experience:
  “I know it’s true but I can’t explain it.”
• “Flatland” (book from 1872) demonstrated this situation:
  • In 2-dimensions, how do you explain “upward, but not northward”? 
• Recognize limits of your ability to think
• Some things are “transintelligible”
  • Statement is true but beyond the mind’s reach
• The word “mystery” is often used for this.
History

• St. Augustine (~ year 400) said that God created space and time *together*.
• To grasp that the *coordinate system* is *created* (not “just there”) was a major stride forward.
• Augustine perceived that God is superior to time and space.
• Several theological puzzles vanished at once.
• But the insight of Augustine was forgotten.
Theological problem: Predestination

How can God know the future without forcing the past?

- Mankind demands an “either/or” answer.
- To accept a “both/and” answer requires stepping up to a higher level of thinking – it’s like “upward but not northward.”
Theological problem:

Process Theology

• Began when Classical Mechanics was at its zenith, determinism was widely accepted, and time was considered absolute.

• Key premise: God changes with time.

• No!! Man’s *perception* of God changes over time, but that doesn’t mean that God changes.
Theological Problem: Evolution

- Hostile question: Why did God have to take so LONG to create what we see?
- The premise here is that God has to watch time drift by the same way we do.
- Too many religious people accept this premise.
  - Unable to answer, they flee from science altogether.
- There is no contradiction between God having a plan and taking a long time.
- God is superior to time.
Summary (1)

• God transcends time and space
• We are limited, but try to make progress.
• Certain words are associated with attributes of God
  One such word is “omnipresence”
• Omnipresence means
  – God is everywhere
  – God Is everywhen
Summary (2)

• To acknowledge a human limitation is a step forward. Mankind had placed a false god (time) before God.

• When something is beyond human comprehension, it is \textit{transintelligible}.
  – God’s transcendence and immanence.

• In the future, others who approach these topics may find this perception about time and space helpful.