

## Does God Watch Paint Dry?

George Rebane  
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Most religious people in the world with faith in an all-knowing - omniscient and prescient - God actually do believe that God watches paint dry, albeit they do so unthinkingly and would deny it when confronted with the question. As a Christian, I want to examine this audacious claim from a Christian viewpoint, although the arguments survive when applied to other major religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Please let me explain.

From their earliest days in Sunday school Christian children are taught about all the ‘omnis’ of God, among those powers is prescience and omniscience. We are taught that God knows - even before the universe was created – our lives from birth to death. It is all an open book to God, all visible at a glance.

This also means that God exists outside of time and space, and is not limited by the concerns of matter and energy. Most Christians believe that God created ‘what is’ as something out ‘there’. In other words, God is here, and the created cosmos is distinct and resides out there. Of course, God knows all of what is going on ‘out there’. We’re not supposed to ask ‘If God is here and His creation is out there, then what is the medium in which they both coexist, and did He also create that medium in which they both coexist?’ (Here and in the sequel we’ll use the old familiar ‘He’ convention for God.)

A more sophisticated brand of Christian theology joins with certain other philosophical traditions and avoids this whole issue by reasonably teaching that the created cosmos (and everything else) exists entirely *within* God – the cosmos is part of God and is thus naturally sustained by Him. This principle is known as Aseity, the fundamental proposition of which is that “Nothing is peculiar to God.” – everything that exists, is fundamentally God. This divine structure does not prohibit God from also assuming any forms or appearances He wants within His creation as He confronts the sapient critters in that creation. (BTW, so that we don’t get hung up on creationism and all that, there is nothing here that contradicts God’s creation through what we know as science-based evolution, or even that this universe has an untold number of sapient civilizations, or even that in His cosmos there are a multitude of universes. We’re here talking about the real God for whom all things are possible.) So Christianity and many other theologies provide for an aseity God – a god entirely sufficient unto Himself with neither an ‘out’ nor a ‘there’ out there. Onward.

As sentient and, without too much hubris, admittedly sapient creatures, it is reasonable to believe Scripture that we also share some attributes that make us to be “in the image of God”. Since this image cannot conform to a necessarily limited physical make-up of God, the promised image must then comprise of shared attributes that are more cognitive and abstract – attributes such as the abilities to be curious, anticipatory, joyful, angry, sad, to learn, remember/recall, and so on.

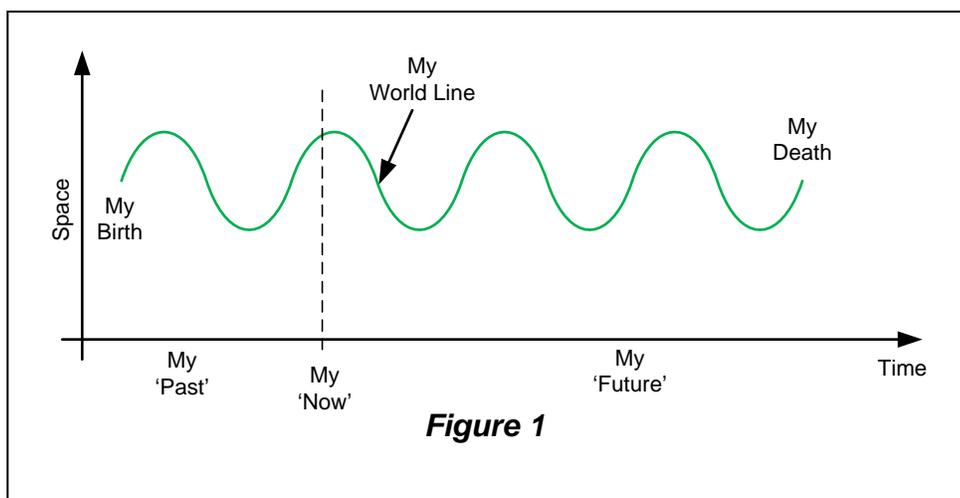
According to the shared Judeo-Christian scriptures, God has made an “ordered” universe for us, and a world which He exhorts us to “subdue”. We understand this to mean that the universe

must be of a form that is discoverable and understandable to us through various types of observation and learning, processes which submit to reason and allow us to expand knowledge from new experiences that take advantage of what we already know from the established corpus of human knowledge.

We were not put into a 'Harry Potter' or a 'Middle Earth' universe where magic rules, and things really operate in mostly *ad hoc* and unrelated ways. For example, to turn a stone into a turtle requires waving your magic wand while chanting a particular phrase, but to turn that same stone into a frog would require preparing an exotic potion and applying it to the rock in a very specific manner. To master such an 'unordered' environment would require one to memorize myriads of such individual protocols, processes, and procedures - a very difficult, and indeed pernicious, way to expand knowledge.

One of the wonders and utter mysteries of our universe is that its behavior can be characterized and predicted (better and better with each passing year) merely by manipulating symbols in a manner that can be mastered by so many of us to useful levels of expertise. In short, we don't know why, but in this universe mathematics does exist, it works, and seems to underpin and be the language that describes our universe. Mathematics is perhaps the most persuasive evidence that we have been put into an "ordered" universe which challenges and invites its discovery by sentient and sapient minds.

Consider the eye of an omniscient and omni-prescient God who exists outside of times and spaces can perceive the entirety of any time dimension in His universe. As we look around us, we plausibly believe that His creatures here and there are required to live in time and space. We experience the present, struggle to remember the past, and are more or less blind to the future. A picture of this kind of existence can be represented by collapsing all space dimensions into one, and then following a point in space over the passage of time as shown by the undulating line in Figure 1. The past is visible and expanding, the present is moving forward in time into a future which may or not be predictable.

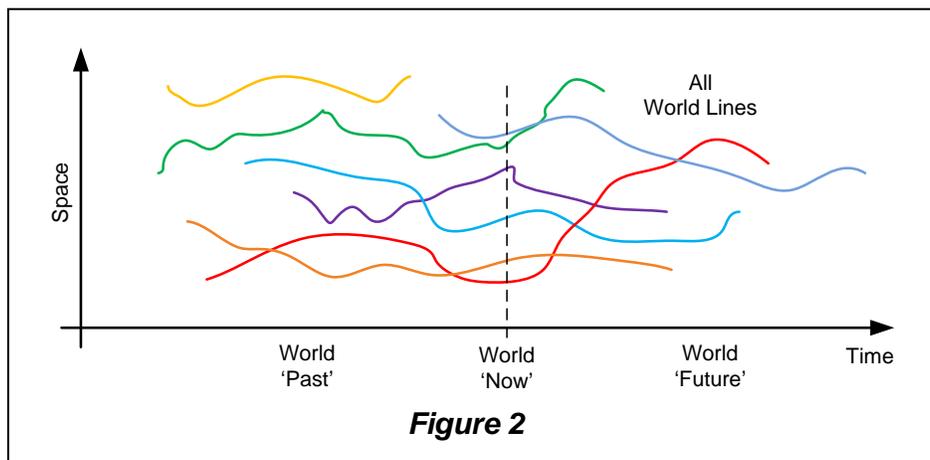


In the figure we see the point moving in a simple and regular curvy line called a sine wave. If the point represented a sentient creature, then that oscillating curve would be called his 'world

line’ – it literally defines his actions and life in space and over time. And in such a life he would only ‘see’ the present and the past. However, an omniscient and prescient God would take in the whole of the critter’s life through all of its existence as shown in Figure 1. That world line, fixed and perceived in its entirety by God, is the complete ‘life line’ and destiny of our sentient creature.

However, for God, the (ongoing) experience of that line is akin to our watching paint dry – that world line in God’s eye is unchanging, and it evinces no more life than the world line of a water molecule; it is essentially a dead automaton, preprogrammed and preordained throughout its existence.

To capture the entirety of such a creation, we may expand this picture into many such world lines for many creatures that cause them to move in arbitrarily complex patterns in space, variously meeting and interacting with each other. They all individually perceive their world as shown in Figure 2 below. In the limited purview of the creatures, life is dynamic and constantly expands into one of a myriad of possible and conceivable future world lines.



However, no matter how complex the resulting gaggle of such world lines is for all these creatures, they are still unchanging and fixed in God’s eye, and therefore equally remote from the dynamic of life. No matter ‘how long’ or ‘how many times’ God perceives such a creation, it is frozen and unchanging within the dimensions that define His creation.

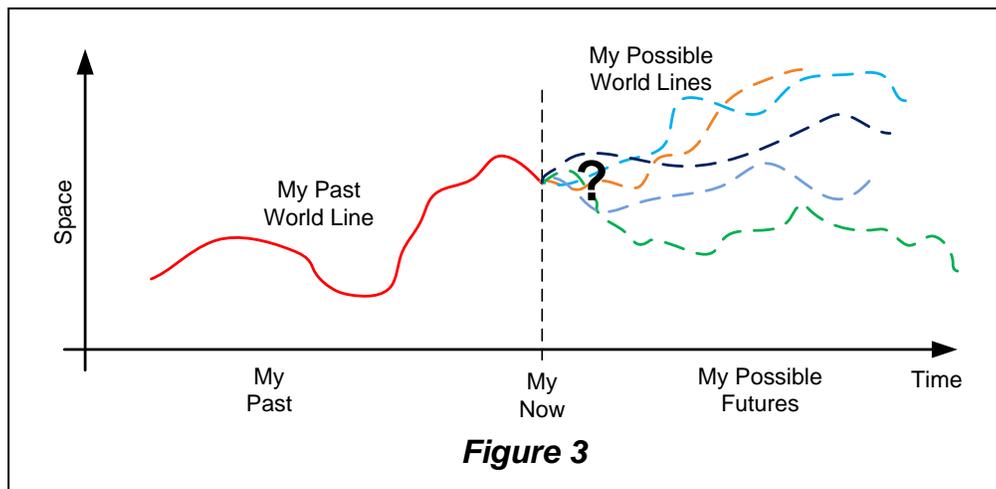
Such a concept of God’s creation and reality leads to an untold number of unanswered questions about a merciful God who lets catastrophes of wholesale slaughter and sadness happen, who is said to grant a ‘free will’ the operation of which no one can explain, and then who predestines certain of His sentient creatures to unspeakable and eternal misery. That Christianity maintains and continues to communicate this inexplicable version of the cosmos results in a falling away of confounded believers, especially as they become educated and demand a more cohesive worldview that is also applicable all seven days of the week and ties with a science that explains how the world works.

The question then is, ‘Is there an understanding of Christianity that has a cogent, let alone relevant, place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as God reveals to us the magnificence of His creation at an ever

accelerating pace?’ Or does secular humanism now become the new intellectual and, yes, even the ‘spiritual’ order of Mankind?

Ultimately what we Christians seek is a scripturally coherent vision of how God manages creation, and an explanation that counters what we now understand as an eternal, cold stasis in spacetime. In actuality, such an immutable world line for humanity was never in Christian scripture. It only arose through errors in its reading and interpretation when the Bible became a fixed canon around 400 AD. After some preliminaries I will discuss interpretations that overcome the seemingly insurmountable contradictions and problems which have crept into our faith. Why they remain there and are not expunged in our modern world is another topic for another time.

In a brief preview, a more felicitous interpretation of scripture can be found in the so-called ‘open theology’ of Christianity such as presented by John Sanders (*The God Who Risks*) and other modern theologians. In their dissertations we see clear answers to questions that have concerned all reasoning believers for centuries. The common thread that resolves is that, *in His sovereignty*, God leaves open that which for us is to come, and constantly makes available uncounted futures that can ‘fan out’ from the eternal ‘now’ of every creature. Moreover, such fanouts also proceed from the ‘now’ of every atom of what we call inanimate matter and energy. Physicists understand this as the dynamic and probabilistic evolution of quantum states that underlie all matter-energy as it exists in time.



In the manner shown above (Figure 3) we all abide in the realm of free will granted us, and possible destinies which we definitely feel we can through our efforts help shape our own path forward. To think that we all proceed as if we are locked onto immutable tracks of inevitability, that have been laid out from before the start of time, is to contemplate a vision of oblivion that for us will come sooner than later.

Let me now structure the remaining development into a sequence of points that take us to the necessary attribute of all life that I am proposing here.

1. Thesis: God, in His sovereignty, does not choose to be omni-prescient about His creation, He does not choose to exist in such a state of stasis. By logical extension a living, omni-prescient God cannot exist.
2. Assumption (tenet of belief) – God, the creator and sustainer of the Cosmos, also ‘created’ us (allowed us to evolve) into His image. This means that our faculties of observation and reasoning are reflections of His own faculties albeit of a much constrained and limited scope.
3. Assumption (tenet of belief) – God is an asei God, there is nothing ‘peculiar’ to Him. All existence is intrinsic to and part of Him. There is no ‘He is there and creation is here.’ All that is, is also He.
4. An omni-prescient God perceives all of creation for all time(s) concurrently, and therefore necessarily exists outside of time (not constrained by the passage of any time in any timeframe.).
5. Given #4, then in God’s eye everything is in stasis – there is no change in His perceived time relevant changes in creation, there are no alternative scenarios or ‘futures’, it is all constant ‘forever’ in the totality of God’s spacetime imposed on the Cosmos. Once created throughout time, His creation is as dead as an automaton going through its pre-programmed motions.
6. Therefore, what we call life exists only to the extent that what comes next is not fixed; instead, the future in every timeframe is always open. All life is a *stochastic process* (explained below) within the dynamic probabilities that God has built into the Cosmos. Existence here is perceived within the cognitive frames of the living critters and God. If God knows the complete and fixed future (in spacetime) of the critter, then that critter is dead in God’s eyes, no matter how complex its concocted world line is through spacetime. In God’s eye it is in eternal stasis with everything about it known through eternity. There will be no surprises, that critter is to God the same as staring at a rock is to us.
7. Given #6, there is no reason for God to devote any attention to such a fixed world line that He has created, it would be of less interest to Him than the proverbial watching paint dry.
8. And if everything in the Cosmos were created with fixed world lines, then in God’s cognition the whole Cosmos would be fixed and ‘dead’, not worth watching, monitoring, expecting, hoping, and most of all, not worth loving.
9. To the extent that we are created in His image, we share certain critical attributes with Him. And if in His eyes we are to live, then these shared attributes would include curiosity, the ability to reason and plan, the joy of novelty, discovery, and surprise, the fulfillment of hope, the sorrow of loss, anger, sympathy, compassion, ..., and the ability to love and sacrifice for the benefit of the beloved.
10. This all translates to a God who, in His sovereignty, has created myriads of lives each of which have the ability to constantly surprise Him, and thus provide Him with unanticipated happiness, sorrow, anger, ..., and, above all, a reason to love His creation, and take joy in the possibility, not certainty, of being loved in return.
11. Therefore, in our understanding God lives, because, in His sovereignty, He refuses to look into the complete and exact futures of all that He has created. All these unknown and unfolding futures are the part of His own very (stochastic) existence that we can un-

derstand in the world around us, and to which we can respond. And because He is alive, we are alive.

12. In its turn, it is therefore the stochasticity (random nature) of His creation that also gives us our free will and makes us in His eyes worthy of tending, loving, and, yes, even righteously rejecting. (Without stochasticity, righteousness has no meaning.) And that is the part of our Creator's life that makes Him to us a reachable God. We are full participants in His *Srimad Bhavagatam* – the Game of God.

[Before going on, let me attempt a description of the concept of stochasticity through understanding what is a stochastic process. First, we understand that if we throw a die or draw a card from a well shuffled deck, then we participate in a simple random event. The resulting number on the die or the specific drawn card is called a random variable that the random process outputs as a random event. (Technically the value of a random variable can only be known/predicted to within a probability distribution.)

Now if we combine the two random process by throwing a die and drawing a card, and then, based on the values of the two random variables so generated, we follow some rule (algorithm) to generate another result as a function of these random variables, we would wind up with yet a third random variable that is now said to be the output of a stochastic process. In short, a stochastic process yields a random output that is the result of two or more random processes and a rule (like a law of physics).

Such an output of a stochastic process is often called a stochastic variable, and realworld 'systems' that produce such output variables have a property called stochasticity. (As we might expect, the value of a stochastic variable can also be predicted only to within a possibly even more complex probability distribution.) And the grand conclusion here is that all life is stochastic, because what we perceive is the product of what to us can only be broken down into an uncountable number of precursor random processes that yield the stochastic variable (e.g. a critter's behavior) that we observe.]

As discussed above, there is a most reasonable basis for the arguments summarized in the twelve points in the open theology interpretation of scripture. This interpretation of Christianity is not well received by the evangelical and fundamentalist segments of the faith, even though it would cut through the many conundrums that traditional Christianity presents to non-believers and thinking believers alike.

Open theology is available to the intelligent reader through the writings of John Sanders (*The God Who Risks*) and Gregory Boyd (*God of the Possible*), and others. In these works Sanders and Boyd successfully tackle longstanding and difficult questions like 'If God knows that certain people will go to Hell, then why did he create them?', 'Does God foreknow the outcome of every decision we will ever make?', 'If God is omnipotent and orders all creation, can God be vulnerable to that creation?', 'Can God be in control of anything at all without constantly controlling everything?'

Let's now look at what I claim is a most reasonable scientific basis for the above numbered points.

God has revealed the core of this in two (and possibly three) major aspects of His design of the universe. The first was quantum theory which has been verified by every imaginable experiment to which it has been subjected. In quantum theory God tells us that His creation is a stochastic process defined by the evolution of probability distributions at every level. (And recently, it has been proposed that stochasticity is the fundamental process that makes our universe possible. Now there is a theological revelation.) In our universe there is no certainty in going forward, only stochasticity. It turns out that God does roll dice, lots of them.

Second, this universe appears constructed of discrete building blocks in matter, energy, space, and time. These combine and interact with each other in a large yet countable number of ways with a large yet countable number of results. There is no smooth continuity of variables down into the smallest levels that supports an infinite number of futures. This realization has caused a number of the world's leading physicists and cosmologists to report that in the finest detail the universe appears to be a running program on a cosmic computer in which we are embedded intelligent agents or entities.

The third aspect now going through the throes of revelation and discovery is string theory. According to its inner workings, string theory tells us that all matter and energy (and possibly even space and time) are the result of discrete vibrational modes of strings and (mem)branes that exist in highly dimensioned domains (manifolds) beyond our normal ken of three space and one time dimension. This is the long anticipated Theory of Everything that is exciting physicists, and it too succumbs to being understood in the context of a running program in some cosmic computer.

Within the scope of this development, I would like to conclude by pointing the reader, who seeks a scripturally deeper understanding of this comprehensive and cohesive view of God and His creation, to the tenets of open theology (q.v.). As Sanders and Boyle document so exhaustively, the Bible is full of examples that corroborate and sustain open theology's thesis that God, in His sovereignty, has created a cosmos in which He has an abiding interest, and in which life can come into existence that is a worthy object of His love.

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*George Rebane is a retired systems scientist and an entrepreneur in technology based enterprises. He holds degrees in physics and engineering, and has a doctorate in complex dynamic systems and machine intelligence. He lives with his wife in Nevada County, California where he is active in community affairs and writes a blog, a regular newspaper column and radio commentary.*