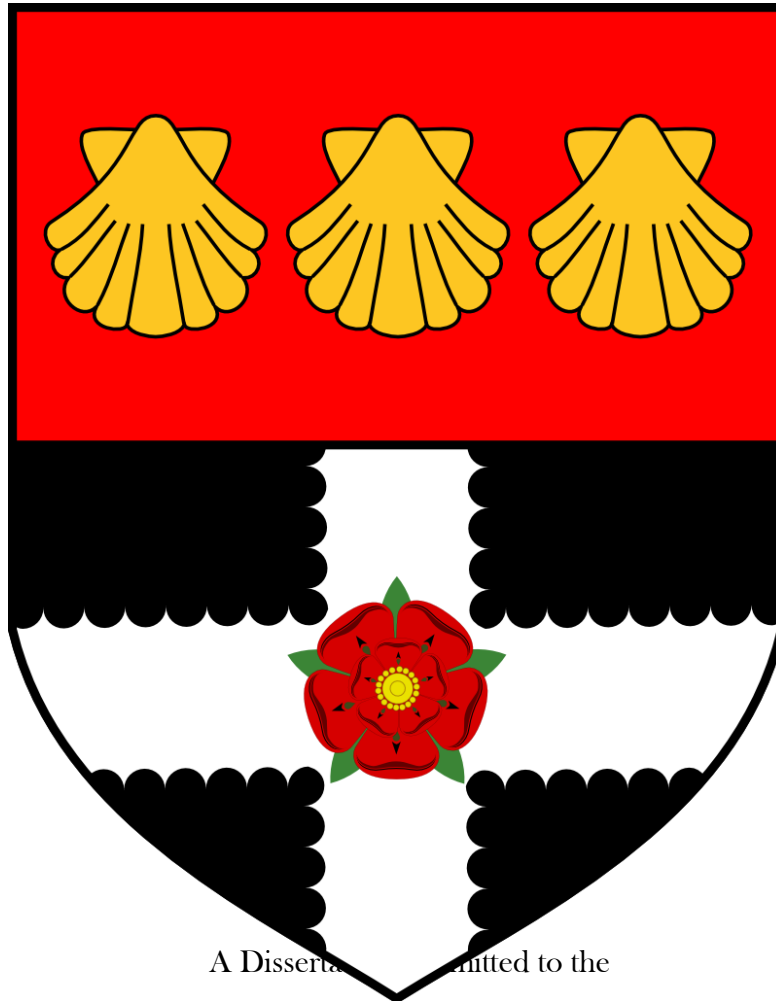


*Thomas Aquinas and Luis de Molina: A Historical-Critical Synthesis in Response to the  
Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*



A Dissertation submitted to the  
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## Abstract

Since the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*, the Thomist and Molinist positions on divine foreknowledge have been portrayed as antithetical. Nowhere has this ostensible incompatibility been more vividly played out than the theories' applicability as a solution to the problem of theological fatalism, the claim that if God has infallible knowledge of future contingent propositions, then human free will is impossible. The thesis argues that while both theories are satisfactory solutions to the problem, there are deficiencies within each that can be addressed by blending the two views. This novel contribution to the scholarship outlines such a synthesis of the Thomist and Molinist positions to resolve the challenge of fatalism and outline a coherent and plausible theory of divine foreknowledge. Through a rigorous exposition of the key concepts of fatalism and freedom, the challenge to the classical theistic concept of articulated, but it is demonstrated that the fatalist position lacks fangs and that a Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP) conception of creaturely freedom can be preserved. A critical exegetical approach is used to assess a range of theories of divine providence, with careful analysis of the merits of Aquinas and Molina's work in particular. In recognition that Aquinas and Molina's work relies on a coherent Boethian account of divine timelessness, a firm distinction between God's eternality and creation's temporality is defended with an appeal to Special Relativity, Perfect Being theology, and the phenomenological experience of tense. Having demonstrated conclusively the crucial premise of both views, Thomas' emphasis on the divine vision is integrated with Molina's recognition of the role of counterfactual middle knowledge to produce a view that overcomes the objections raised against Thomism and Molinism individually. This highly original synthesis based on what I have termed 'meta-vision' not merely rebuts serious objections; it opens up major theological debates on prayer, sin, and much more.

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Thanks are also due, no doubt, to two men with whom I have become so acquainted I may as well consider them friends: Thomas Aquinas and Luis de Molina. Quite literally, this work would not have been possible without them. I am humbled to be standing on the shoulders of such intellectual giants whose loftiness makes the divine view much clearer.

I also wish to thank my wife, Tatiana, whose love and affection has encouraged me beyond what words can describe. She has been a source of strength, even in the darkest of times, and I give thanks to God that He blessed me with such a loving and steadfast partner with whom to share my life.

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Above all, I give thanks to God with whom I have wrestled, both intellectually and emotionally, over the past four years during the course of this project. This thesis was driven by a desire to draw closer to an understanding of God. It has taken me on a journey through spiritual

mountains and valleys, but I thank Him that I conclude this project with a renewed commitment to serving Him. I pray that it will be to His glory.

*Et Dominus qui ductor est vester, ipse erit tecum: non dimittet, nec derelinquet te: noli timere, nec paveas - Deuteronomium 31:8*

M. J. N

*Oxford, September 2022*

## Introduction

What does God know? How does God's omniscience comport with the concept of creaturely freedom? Has the traditional conception of God, of His attributes and relations with the world, died "the death of a thousand qualifications" as philosophers and theologians have worked hard to analyse in a logically coherent way?<sup>1</sup> These are the sorts of questions that have intrigued and challenged thinkers for two millennia, not least the two protagonists of our expedition into divine omniscience, theological fatalism, and creaturely freedom: Thomas Aquinas and Luis de Molina.

### *1. Aquinas and Molina: Their Lives and Legacy*

Thomas Aquinas, known in his own time as Tommaso d'Aquino, was born in Roccasecca Castle in what is the province of Frosinone in Lazio in 1225. Due to military upheaval, Aquinas was dispatched to the University of Naples in, or shortly after, 1239. At Naples, the young Aquinas studied Arabic and Greek philosophy, becoming a keen scholar of the work of Aristotle and Avicenna, the latter of whom shared his Aristotelian proclivities. While at Naples, Aquinas came under the wing of a Dominican preacher, John de St. Julian, who became his pedagogue. John de St. Julian soon convinced Aquinas that he too should join the Dominican order, a decision that caused a significant rift between Aquinas and his family. His family were so adamantly opposed to it that they felt it best to kidnap and imprison him to prevent him from joining the order and, failing that, hire a prostitute in the hopes that the temptations of the flesh would lead him another way. Yet Aquinas persisted in his enthusiasm for the Dominican tradition. He eventually resumed studies as a student of fellow Dominican Albertus Magnus and began on a life of scholarship, delving into the works of Peter Lombard, Augustine, and Boethius, which persisted until his demise at Fossanova Abbey in the spring of 1274 following

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Flew, *Logic and Language* I (Blackwell, 1951), Chapter X.

complications from tree-related head trauma. While his intellectual life was not without controversy, his learnedness – and his being influenced by such a wide array of fellow theologians and philosophers – was widely recognised and has remained so, with few ups and downs, ever since. In 1567, Pope Pius V conferred the honorary title of *Doctor Ecclesiae Universalis* on Aquinas. Over two centuries later, in his encyclical *Aeternis Patris*, Pope Leo XIII ordered that Aquinas be recognized as the singularly most authoritative intellectual voice in matters of philosophy, such that all Catholics ought to “aim at restoring the renowned teaching of Thomas Aquinas and winning it back to its ancient beauty.”<sup>2</sup> Even comparatively recently, Anthony Kenny lauded Aquinas as “one of the dozen greatest philosophers of the western world.”<sup>3</sup> The verdict is difficult to avoid. Aquinas produced a swathe of works, such as the *Summa Theologica*, which have shaped Western civilization in a way that few thinkers have managed to do. His intellectual project, as it were, was to synthesise the works of Aristotle with Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Aquinas was, as Ralph McInerny and John O’Callaghan note, “fundamentally an Aristotelian.”<sup>5</sup> This project, as we shall see, shows how Aristotle had a tremendous impact on Aquinas’ work of divine foreknowledge. His work on foreknowledge was also inspired by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a 6<sup>th</sup> century Roman official who produced the skeleton of Aquinas’ work on foreknowledge while in prison awaiting trial for treason against Theodoric the Great. As we shall see in due course, Aquinas’ view owes a great intellectual debt to Boethius. Aquinas was not the only medieval philosopher inspired by Boethius, though his full influence is yet to be determined and is likely underappreciated.<sup>6</sup> Aquinas’ contribution came

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Leo XIII, ‘Aeterni Patris’, as quoted at: Adrian Nichols, *Modern Catholic Thought from Hermes to Benedict XVI* (Chicago, 2009), 120.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Kenny, ‘Introduction’, in: Anthony Kenny (ed.), *A Collection of Critical Essays* (London, 1969), 1

<sup>4</sup> This is covered well in an edited volume: *Aristotle in Aquinas’ Theology*, eds. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Ralph McInerny and John O’Callaghan, ‘St Thomas Aquinas’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/>>, (accessed: 21/09/2022); cf. Ed Feser, *Aristotle’s Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science* (Editiones Scholasticae, 2019), *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> There is much work left to do on ascertaining Boethius’ medieval influence, see: Siobhan Nash-Marshall, ‘Boethius’s Influence on Theology and Metaphysics to c.1500’, in: Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips (eds.), *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012), 167ff.



in the midst of a broader scholastic debate on divine foreknowledge, as we shall see in the next few chapters. This area of research is a growing area of interest, especially among younger scholars. Mikko Posti's very recent monograph *Medieval Theories of Divine Providence 1250-1350* is among the first of serious works in understanding Aquinas in his medieval context in this latest surge of scholarly interest.<sup>7</sup>

Luis de Molina, by contrast, is sadly much less recognized than Aquinas. While Aquinas has commanded a place on university syllabi for millennia, Molina's presence is less consistent. Despite a resurgence of interest in his work since the 1980s, he is not particularly well known outside of evangelical circles.<sup>8</sup> Within evangelical academic circles, Molina's ideas have been given centre stage at conferences and in papers.<sup>9</sup> Molina was born in Cuenca in Spain in 1535 and, even as a child, it was expected that Molina would dedicate himself to law. It was to that end that he entered the University of Salamanca in 1551, opting to read law.<sup>10</sup> After a year, the young Molina decided to leave Salamanca to move to the university at Alcalá de Henares, where he studied law for six months before entering theological studies. According to Diego Alonso-Lasheras, it remains unclear why Molina made this 250km move.<sup>11</sup> However, Kirk MacGregor's 'religious conversion' argument is satisfactory. While at Salamanca, Molina became deeply interested in the Jesuit movement. Alcalá de Henares and Salamanca were exceptional in incorporating Jesuit teaching into their curriculum, despite broad hostility to that idea across Europe. At first sight, it is unclear what influence this Jesuit background had on Molina's doctrine of divine foreknowledge. However, in a recent piece, Juan Cruz Cruz [sic.]

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<sup>7</sup> Mikko Posti, *Medieval Theories of Divine Providence, 1250-1350* (Leiden, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> An interesting illustration of this is that if you simply Google 'Aquinas', the entire first page of search results has some link to Thomas Aquinas. If you Google 'Molina', Luis de Molina does not appear until page nine of the search and even then his name constitutes only one of the search results (Google Search, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Kirk R. MacGregor, *Luis de Molina, The Life and Theology of The Founder of Middle Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, 2015), 13. This has extended into non-evangelical scholarship too as I have delivered three papers on Molinism at international conferences in the past several years.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Bartholomew Castello, *The Political Philosophy of Luis de Molina, S.J. (1535-1600)* (Spokane, 1974), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Diego Alonso-Lasheras, *Luis de Molina's De Iustitia et Iure: Justice as Virtue in an Economic Context* (Leiden, 2011), 12.

has effectively identified the instrumental role that his Jesuit commitments had on him.<sup>12</sup>

Molina thrived on hostility and never wore gloves to a controversy. As the first Jesuit to ever write a commentary on the *Summa*, he was uniquely qualified to evaluate Aquinas' ideas and offer alternatives. It was from this study that his own *Concordia* was born. Unfortunately, Molina never learned the fate of his doctrine. The Papacy appointed the Congregatio de Auxiliis Gratiae in 1598 but Molina died two years later, shortly after having been appointed to the chair of moral theology at the University of Madrid, a Jesuit institution.

We shall later on how other characters contributed to the theological fatalist debate. However, for now, it suffices to see how both Aquinas and Molina's contributions were borne out of – and enhanced – vibrant theological debates that existed in the medieval and early modern period. This all raises an important question: why do the Thomistic and Molinist approaches to the question of theological fatalism hold such sway now?

In Aquinas' case, it is partly a case that his reputation – in death, as in life – precedes him. He earned his stripes at the University of Paris, which was – to borrow William Michael's phrase – “pregnant with the odour of a hundred lofty names.”<sup>13</sup> His association with such high-profile theologians as William of Shyreswood (who taught at Paris prior to Aquinas' arrival but whose reputation left an indelible mark) and William of Auvergne (Bishop of Paris) provided Aquinas with a credibility which he vindicated on his own merits. For centuries, Aquinas has been synonymous with the best of scholastic scholarship and, as such, what he has to say on this or that matter has been taken with due seriousness, especially by theologians of a Catholic persuasion. In a sense, Aquinas' solution is more properly called the ‘Boethian’ solution, since Aquinas used Boethius' work as a foundation, but the fact that the view is associated more so with Aquinas is a testament to his reputation. However, while the Thomistic solution has always

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<sup>12</sup> Juan Cruz Cruz, ‘Predestination as Transcendent Teleology: Molina and the First Molinism’, in: Alexander Aichele and Mathias Kaufmann (eds.), *The Brill Companion to Luis De Molina* (Leiden, 2013), 89–121.

<sup>13</sup> William C. Michael, *The Life and Labours of St. Thomas Aquinas* (N/A, 2020), 71.

been popular in discussions of foreknowledge, it has not always been widely known to philosophers more broadly. While Neothomism had become very influential by 1870, as seen in the Thomistic influence on *Aeterni Patris*, by the end of the nineteenth century, Aquinas began to fall out of popularity in the Catholic church again.<sup>14</sup> This was exacerbated by the rise of logical positivism and verificationism in the early twentieth century, and talk of God among philosophers withered. Such talk, as A.J. Ayer would say, was defective. H. H. Price recognized this well in a paper presented at Aberystwyth in May 1934:

[I]f the doctrine of Logical Positivism with regard to the pre-conditions of meaningfulness be accepted, there is no escaping the consequence that theological statements are nonsensical; that is that they are not even false.<sup>15</sup>

Although logical positivism soon died by suicide, its footprint contributed to Nietzsche's legacy in the form of the rise of the Death of God movement in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>16</sup> On April 6<sup>th</sup> 1966, *TIME* magazine thrust this decline of theism in the academy into the public eye when it published its iconic 'Is God Dead?' cover. However, despite decades in the philosophical wilderness, philosophy of religion experienced a renaissance in the 1970s and 80s (notably catalysed by the formation of the Evangelical Philosophical Society in 1974 and the Society of Christian Philosophers in 1977) with the proliferation of a wide range of serious, theistic scholarship: God, characteristically, has been resurrected. William Alston, Alvin Plantinga, George Mavrodes, Richard Swinburne, Nicholas Wolterstorff were instrumental in this revival.<sup>17</sup> Two of the leading figures in this revolution were two brilliant young Catholic philosopher, Eleonore Stump, and her doctoral supervisor, Norman Kretzmann. Stump and

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<sup>14</sup> Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition: Cambridge, 1987), 192.

<sup>15</sup> H. H. Price, 'Logical Positivism and Theology', *Philosophy* 10:39 (1935), 330.

<sup>16</sup> On the *theothanatology* movement's rise and fall as a sociological phenomenon, see: Stanley N. Gunfry, 'Death of God Theology', in: Walter A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, 2001), 327.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel von-Wachter, 'Protestant Theology', in: Chad Meister and Paul Copan (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Abingdon, 2013), 555.

Kretzmann thrust Thomism back into the philosophical limelight – especially in the context of divine foreknowledge – with their 1981 landmark work on divine eternity.<sup>18</sup> Their work sparked a resurgence of interest and the Thomistic approach to theological fatalism has found able and prominent defenders since. Of particular note is Joseph Diekemper, whose 2013 article ‘Eternity, Knowledge, and Freedom’ has become much discussed.<sup>19</sup> More noteworthy is the most authoritative voice on foreknowledge alive today: Harm Goris. Goris’ *Free Creatures of an Eternal God* is the definitive work on the question of foreknowledge from a Thomistic perspective.<sup>20</sup> As Goris’ prominence indicates, the reach of this contemporary revival has spread beyond the Anglophone world and is impacting philosophy on the European continent. In more recent work, this is demonstrated by Ciro de Florio and Aldo Friderio’s extremely impressive 2019 monograph on the topic.<sup>21</sup>

Molinism, as noted, never quite enjoyed the influence of Thomism. That said, Molina himself enjoyed great eminence during his lifetime. “Molina’s prominence within early modern European theological circles and as the leading Jesuit theologian of his generation cannot be overstated,” writes Michael VanZandt Collins.<sup>22</sup> And yet, following his death, his work was largely forgotten. This is perhaps best illustrated by the anecdote that at a conference on omniscience in Constanta, Romania, a member of the audience asked ‘So what is a Molina?’ at the end of a paper on foreknowledge.<sup>23</sup> The rise of Molinism in contemporary philosophy more-or-less follows the same pattern as the revival of Thomism – but from a more evangelical

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<sup>18</sup> Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, ‘Eternity’, *Journal of Philosophy* 78:8 (1981), 429–58; cf. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, ‘Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald’, *Journal of Philosophy* 84:4 (1987), 214–19; and Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, ‘Eternity, Awareness, and Action’, *Faith and Philosophy* 9:4 (1992), 463–82.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Diekemper, ‘Eternity, Knowledge, and Freedom’, *Religious Studies* 49:1 (2013), 45–64.

<sup>20</sup> Harm J. M. J. Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God’s Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will* (Nijmegen, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Ciro de Florio and Aldo Friderio, *Divine Omniscience and Human Free Will: A Logical and Metaphysical Analysis* (Cham, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Michael VanZandt Collins, ‘Review: A Companion to Luis de Molina’, edited by Matthias Kaufmann and Alexander Aichele, *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2:1 (2015), 161.

<sup>23</sup> Personal anecdote.

angle. The Molinist view was re-discovered by Alvin Plantinga when developing his free will defense.<sup>24</sup> As Ken Perszyk has noted: “Molinism may have been relegated to a dark, dusty corner of a museum for the history of philosophical theology were it not for Alvin Plantinga's ‘reinvention’ of it in the course of developing his Free Will Defence against the Logical Argument from Evil in the early 1970s.”<sup>25</sup> Plantinga’s rediscovery of Molinism was the beginning of its ascension to being the foremost view of providence among evangelical scholars working on foreknowledge. The torch of Molinism was taken by a range of scholars across the theological divide, notably William Lane Craig, Alfred Freddoso, and Thomas Flint.<sup>26</sup> Freddoso was particularly instrumental in the rise of Molinist scholarship, not simply by virtue of his own contributions, but by the fact he produced the first English translation of Molina’s *Concordia* in 1988 thereby making Molina accessible to the masses.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the vast majority of Molina’s work has not yet been translated into English – a project that, if a Latinist were to undertake it, would be of immense value to philosophers. Research outputs on Molinism seemed to increase exponentially 2000s – particularly due to Ken Perszyk, whose 2011 edited volume *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* – the product of a 2008 conference at Victoria University of Wellington of the same name – summarised the direction of the field.<sup>28</sup>

Promising too is that there has also been a move to align and compare the different perspectives in this renaissance of interest in foreknowledge, such as has not been seen for centuries. John Martin Fischer and Patrick Todd’s edited volume *Freedom, Fatalism, and*

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<sup>24</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, 1977), 7-59. Ken Perszyk has built on this in: Kenneth J. Perszyk, ‘Free Will Defence with and without Molinism’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43:1 (1998), 29-64.

<sup>25</sup> Ken Perszyk, ‘Introduction’, in: Ken Perszyk (ed.), *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford, 2011), 6.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example: William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Leiden, 1991), especially 222-78 and Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden, 1988), especially 169-206; Alfred Freddoso, ‘Introduction’, in: Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia* (Ithaca, 1988), 1-81; and Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> The translation is also of tremendous use of scholars working from the Latin since the text is unusually difficult.

<sup>28</sup> See fn.24.

*Foreknowledge* has successfully brought together a range of different perspectives,<sup>29</sup> as has James Beilby and Paul Eddy's volume based upon their perceived need to acknowledge the growing popularity of open theism and its interaction with other views at the turn of the millennium.<sup>30</sup> The stage, then, has been set for further discussion of the links between contrasting views and how they can complement and criticise one another. This PhD thesis is a novel and significant contribution to this fairly new trend in that it attempts to bring together Thomism and Molinism in greater unity.

## *2. The Importance of Providence*

Throughout this dissertation, the importance of providence and its compatibility with free human agency should become clear. However, from the start, it is helpful to identify why theists ostensibly need to resolve any apparent contradiction between the two.

First, in regards to providence and omniscient, it is widely held in theistic circles that God is perfect. He is uniquely omniscient and omnipotent, exercising power over all of creation. In ayah 16 of Surat Al-Hujuraat in the Qur'an, Allah proclaims of Himself: "Say, 'Do you inform Allah of your faith, when Allah already knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth? And Allah has perfect knowledge of all things.'"<sup>31</sup> The providence and omniscience are core to His perfection, without which He simply would not be God. In Judaism, it was God's providence and omniscience that allowed Him to promise the emancipation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and to know that it will come to pass that Moses will lead them across the Yam Suph to Canaan. "Do not be afraid. Stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today," God assured Moses.<sup>32</sup> For Christians, Christ's coming was

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<sup>29</sup> *Freedom, Fatalism, and Foreknowledge*, ed. John Martin Fischer and Patrick Todd (New York, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Qur'an 49:16. The translation used is *The Clear Qur'an: a Thematic English Translation of the Message of the Final Revelation*, trans. Mustafa Khattab (Lombard, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 14:13 (ESV).

part of God's providential plan for salvation. Christian soteriology ceases to make sense if Jesus' declaration that "The Son of Man [...] will be killed. But after three days he will be raised from death" becomes mere speculation.<sup>33</sup> The idea that God uses His knowledge of the future to guide events and achieve some broader purpose is integral to theism, especially of the Abrahamic variety. In short, the very perfection of God and the defensibility of the three Abrahamic faiths hinges on God's being omniscient and having providence.

In regards to free will, free agency – the ability to do otherwise – is integral to theism. While many prominent Christian theologians such as Jean Calvin and Martin Luther are seen as being opposed to free will by virtue of their advocacy of *servum arbitrium*, free human agency is a basic commitment of their theologies. Speaking of the Fall, Calvin stresses the voluntariness of human action:

[W]e must always remember that he voluntarily deprived himself of the rectitude that he had received from God, voluntarily gave himself up to the service of sin and Satan, and voluntarily precipitated himself into destruction.<sup>34</sup>

Calvin here is alluding to something shared across Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: a belief that free agency is required to explain sin. If man sins, he cannot be determined by God, for a perfectly good God would be incapable of making a man sin and therefore commit evil by proxy. Likewise, free will is required to make sense of conversion and faith. If God determines one's faith, the Epistle to Timothy's suggestion that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" becomes nonsensical.<sup>35</sup> St. Chrysostom takes that passage further, invoking believers to pray that people be saved.<sup>36</sup> There is human agency involved in

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<sup>33</sup> Luke 9:22

<sup>34</sup> John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London, 1961), 121; cf. A. N. S. Lane, 'Did Calvin Believe in Free Will?', *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981), 73-74.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4 (ESV).

<sup>36</sup> John Chrysostom, 'Homily VII on Timothy', in: Phillip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Volume 13 (New York, 1984), 430; cf. Jordan Wessling, 'Interceding for the Lost: On the Effectiveness of

salvation. Without free agency, this model of salvation becomes unintelligible. Likewise, Islam assumes human agency. Ismail al-Faruqi, for instance, stresses human power over their decisions in Islam:

But men and women are not in that predicament. Humans are not ethically powerless. They are not helpless puppets capable of neither good nor evil. They are capable of both. To "save" themselves by deeds and works is their pride and glory. To miss the chance and pass all the opportunities by is pitiable neglect; to miss the calling deliberately and to do evil is to earn punishment, to deserve damnation.<sup>37</sup>

The final destination of souls, be it *Jannah* or *Jahannam*, cannot be divorced from free human agency. As such, free will is integral to the most popular forms of theism. Theists, then, have a profound incentive to ensure that free will and divine providence are consistent. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob requires such consistency; any contradiction would refute the existence of such a God and, by implication, the truth claims of these religions. In this thesis, I defend a libertarian account of freedom that defines freedom in terms of the ability to do otherwise in order to capture this deep Abrahamic commitment.

### *3. Unifying Thomism and Molinism: An Outline*

As we saw above both Thomism and Molinism were revived in a similar way, and both are offering solutions to a problem for which the stakes are enormously high, so suggest that now is the time to bring them together. Of course, other scholars have attempted to bring them together in discussion in more recent edited volumes. As noted, in *Divine Knowledge: Four Views*, James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy drew the two views into the conversation. A similar project, though more conceptual in its focus on timelessness and temporality, was undertaken

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Petitioning God for the Salvation of Others', in: Oliver D. Crisp, James M. Arcadi, and Jordan Wessling (eds.), *Analyzing Prayer: Theological and Philosophical Essays* (Oxford, 2022), 24-24.

<sup>37</sup> Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, *Islam* (Niles, 1979), 9. A similar view is held by Fazlur Rahman in *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis, 1980), 63ff.



by Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier in *God, Eternity, and Time*.<sup>38</sup> However, what this dissertation aims to do is not merely bring the two views together into discourse, but to synthesise the views to create a more compelling solution to the problem of theological fatalism. To that end, this dissertation will take the following structure:

In chapter 1, I introduce the theological fatalist dilemma. In this chapter, I expound the dilemma in its various historical manifestations. Further, following Alicia Finch and Ted Warfield,<sup>39</sup> I argue that theological fatalism is, in fact, a form of logical fatalism and that any refutation of the latter would, *a fortiori*, refute the former, if we approach the question from a proper understanding of God. Having sketched out the problem and its reducibility to theological fatalism, I offer some grounds for supposing that logical fatalism is false. This would entail that even if Aquinas and Molina's solutions to the problem fail, fatalism lacks fangs.

In chapter 2, I outline what is meant by 'freedom' or 'free will'. In that chapter, I defend two accounts of freedom that are equally compatible with the Thomistic and Molinist approaches. One form is a form of the principle of alternative possibilities, where one is able to act otherwise. If one is able to act other than they in fact do, then God's foreknowledge is not determinative. Following Mark Wiebe, I argue that Aquinas himself likely subscribed to something akin to the PAP.<sup>40</sup> The second form is a view of freedom according to which one is free simply by virtue of their actions being free of determinative causal influence. Although these two conceptions of freedom are related, I argue for a version of PAP as an account of what constitutes libertarian freedom. In this chapter, I also address the question of why a libertarian account of freedom should be defended. To that end, I appeal to two intuitions that we have: moral responsibility and phenomenological experience. In regards to the former, as

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<sup>38</sup> *God, Eternity, and Time*, ed. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (Farnham, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Alicia Finch and Ted B. Warfield, 'Fatalism', *Faith and Philosophy* 16:2 (1999), 233–38; and Ted B. Warfield, 'Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom Are Compatible', *Nous* 31 (1997), 80–86.

<sup>40</sup> Mark B. Wiebe, *On Evil, Providence, and Freedom: A New Reading of Molina* (DeKalb, 2017), 71–81.

we have alluded to here in the introduction, I argue that moral responsibility makes little sense if we are not free. The idea of holding agents responsible for determined actions is equivalent to holding them responsible for being pushed. Given that we have such strong intuitions about freedom and moral responsibility, we should give weight to those intuitions in the absence of a conclusive defeater. In regards to the latter, I offer a similar rationale: it is overwhelmingly apparent to us in experience that our actions are free. G. E. Moore famously provided a common-sense objection to philosophical scepticism by noting ‘Here is one hand’.<sup>41</sup> In like manner, I take our common-sense experience of freedom – that I feel I can choose to raise my hand or not – to be *prima facie* justification for libertarian freedom.

Having outlined the argument and what we hope to defend, chapter 3 provides a historical survey of approaches to the problem of theological fatalism. While not exhaustive, it will cover some of the key figures to attempt to contextualise the continuity of responses to the problem across the theological tradition. This chapter will identify the important intellectual milieu in which Aquinas and Molina’s own positions were developed and defended. It will also sketch briefly why these positions are inferior to Aquinas’ and Molina’s, furthering the proposition that the theist – should they want a response to theological fatalism – should look to the Dominican and the Jesuit.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed exegesis of Aquinas’ view, drawing heavily on his work in the *Summa*. In this chapter, I develop and attempt to resolve some interpretative disputes that pertain to Aquinas’ view of God’s knowledge. For example, I defend David Oderberg’s view that Aquinas was a premotionist and expound the relevance of this for his solution to theological fatalism. I also begin to sketch out whether it is fair to call Aquinas a B-theorist of time. I conclude, *contra* William Lane Craig, that Aquinas was not a B-theorist. The claim that

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<sup>41</sup> G. E. Moore, ‘Proof of an External World’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25 (1939), 273–300.

Aquinas was a B-theorist results from a conflation of his views. If he were understood as a B-theorist, his solution to theological fatalism would be undermined.

In chapter 5, I explore the interpretations of Molina offered by Thomas Flint, Alfred Freddoso, and – more from a more a revisionist bent – Mark Wiebe. Like Wiebe, I argue that Molinism has broadly misunderstood in its history, though I – elsewhere in this dissertation – argue that Wiebe himself misdiagnoses the Thomistic capacity to deal with modal theory.<sup>42</sup>

In chapter 6, I defend the doctrine of divine timelessness, or holochronic existence (to use Robert Pasnau's term).<sup>43</sup> I argue that God's perfection, as Anselm identified, requires timelessness. Moreover, divine timelessness provides a more coherent and defensible framework for responding to the problem of theological fatalism than divine temporalism. The latter is either inconsistent with divine aseity or ties God to causal sequences that render Him determinative over human action. I undermine attacks on divine timelessness, particularly from the work of William Hasker and Brian Leftow. In doing so, I defend a classical account of divine timelessness espoused by Aquinas. In this chapter, I take an agnostic approach to Stump and Kretzmann's ET-simultaneity thesis, arguing that whether we accept their account of the exact relation between time and eternity is optional; the truth of Aquinas' view does not hinge on it.

In chapter 8, as an expansion on chapter 7, I defend the coherence of divine action *sans* time. Common objections to timelessness are often predicated on the question of how God can act outside of time since action, the objection holds, is an inherently temporal phenomenon. I argue that God acts *outside* of time to produce effects in time and that it is only the effects of His actions in relation to the world that require temporality. I analyse divine action in terms of

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<sup>42</sup> On this, see: Wiebe, *On Evil*, 77-81. Wiebe notes middle knowledge would assist in overcoming the Thomistic problems.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Pasnau, 'On Existing All at Once', in: Tapp and Runggaldier (eds.), *God, Eternity, and Time*, chapter 1.

states of affairs and note that there is nothing inherently temporal about states of affairs. Action is, I argue, simply the changing of some states of affairs and that this change need not be temporally-located. A key feature of this chapter is that I stress that a dynamic conception of time is essential to leaving the future sufficiently open to enable creaturely freedom.

In chapter 9, I explore and refute common criticisms of Molinism. In particular, I respond to criticisms from Robert Adams and William Hasker, arguing that Molinism can comfortably accommodate the objections thrown its way. The main objection that I explore is the so-called ‘grounding objection’, in which response to which I offer three solutions: properly basic beliefs about counterfactuals, the Law of Conditional Excluded Middle, and the invocation of possible worlds semantics. While the lattermost response is the angle I take for the remainder of the dissertation, I defend the plausibility of the first two approaches too.

In chapter 10, I explore – briefly – the ways in which Molinism and Thomism complement each other as solutions to the problem of theological fatalism – such as how they draw on the same concept of eternity. Noting their shared ancestry, I identify that Molinism’s emphasis on counterfactuals seems to be a promising area that Aquinas’ theory fails to adequately accommodate. Applying middle knowledge more explicitly to Aquinas’ framework of time – as a novel idea that I term ‘meta-vision’ – has the capacity to enrich the Thomistic concept of omniscience as well as resolve the problem of theological fatalism. I outline a theory of counterfactuals that resolves the grounding objection and explains how counterfactuals of creaturely freedom can be warranted without compromising divine aseity. This approach, which unifies Aquinas and Molina’s key ideas of ‘knowledge of vision’ and ‘middle knowledge’ respectively into ‘meta-vision’, highlights how God can know future conditionals as true without determinism. This approach, which draws on Berkelian idealism and analogies to fiction, is then tentatively defended against a number of potential objections.

In chapter 11, I explore the potential consequences of our synthesis for a range of religious phenomena. I argue that our refutation of the problem of theological fatalism yields fruitful possibilities for discussions of these other areas of philosophy and theology, especially the problem of suffering. I argue that God's foreknowledge of how one would freely respond to suffering provides good justification for supposing that God has a morally sufficient reason to permit suffering, for it could well be the case that that suffering serves some higher moral purpose.

In the conclusion, I will then draw together the different strands of argument to paint a more comprehensive and unified account of God and His knowledge. I will also stress the novelty of this thesis in substance and method. While much of the literature has evolved with increasing abstraction, it should be clear that my epistemological approach is shaped partly by the Aristotelian and Scottish school of common-sense realism approaches to philosophy.<sup>44</sup> While analytic, this dissertation marks an attempt to try and rein in the increasing abstraction and ground our understanding of God more in our common-sense intuitions. In other words, it aims to help us better know what God knows from what we do already know. Moreover, it is my hope that this project opens up further discourse on the divine attributes and, in doing so, provides theists and non-theists alike with a better understanding of what – or who – exactly this 'God' character is.

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<sup>44</sup> On the Scottish 'common-sense' approach, I follow in the tradition of Thomas Reid.

## Chapter 1: The Theological Fatalist Dilemma – its Formulation and Background

Fatalism is usually defined as the view that “deliberation and actions are pointless because the future will be the same no matter what we do.”<sup>45</sup> Linda Zagzebski notes that the traditional definition, namely a definition that defines fatalism exclusively in terms of the future, fails to expound corollary features that the unchangeability of the future entails.<sup>46</sup> If fatalism is the view that that future events are unchangeable as a result of deliberation and action, it must also be the view that all events are unchangeable in the same matter. This might strike us as a rather more controversial thesis but this expansion of the traditional definition of fatalism is an inescapable consequence of fatalism’s denial of the efficacy of agency. If all future events are fixed, that is, the same no matter what we do, then it must follow that our present and past events are likewise fixed, for they were once future events. For example, suppose it in an escapable fact that at some future point,  $t_3$ , Jane will attend temple. Now, at  $t_2$ , the fatalist posits, the state of affairs in which Jane goes to the temple at  $t_3$  will obtain, no matter what she does now because it is a future event. However,  $t_2$ , what is now the present, was itself future relative to  $t_1$ . That is to say, at  $t_1$ , the event at  $t_2$  is a future event. As such, the fatalist thesis is a radical claim not merely about the changeability of the future, but of all events – past, present, and future. Not only was Jane’s going to the temple fixed independently of her deliberation and action, so were all the other events that she experienced.

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<sup>45</sup> Roy C. Weatherford, ‘Fatalism’, in: Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford, 1995), 270.

<sup>46</sup> Linda Zagzebski, ‘Eternity and Fatalism’, in: Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (eds.), *God, Eternity, and Time* (Farnham, 2011), 65.

Generally speaking, philosophers have distinguished between fatalism and determinism. For example, Gerald Dworkin draws this distinction clearly:

Determinism should not be confused with what might be called predeterminism, or fatalism. Fatalism states that our output is not affected by any efforts or decisions that we make. This is a stronger claim than determinism, in effect not only claiming that our outputs are caused, but specifying certain factors as being causally irrelevant to the outcome.<sup>47</sup>

Dworkin's distinction runs along similar lines to Paul Russell's, distinguishing fatalism from determinism on the basis of the ineffectualness of deliberation and action. Russell has stressed the deliberative and actional aspects of fatalism, arguing that "[f]atalism is the doctrine that all our deliberations and actions and makes no difference."<sup>48</sup> This is technically true but it fails to capture important emphases. As we will see, theological fatalist arguments do not stress the effectuality of agency as some sort of accidental feature, but as a necessary consequence of the fixedness of the future. The pertinent point in regards to fatalism is not that deliberation and actions *are* causally ineffectual; rather, it is that they *could not be* causally effectual because the future is determined. In this sense, the fatalist is not particularly distinguishable from the hard determinist; agency becomes irrelevant in light of what is determined.<sup>49</sup> Fatalist arguments argue for the fixedness of the future and deduce the inefficacy of human agency from that. Construed in this way, the line between fatalism and determinism is increasingly blurred as it becomes clearer that the fatalists and determinists share a commitment to the determinedness of the future. In a sense, contrary to Dworkin and Russell, what primarily distinguishes fatalism and

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<sup>47</sup> Gerald Dworkin, 'Introduction', in: Gerald Dworkin (ed.), *Determinism, Free Will, and Moral Responsibility* (Englewood Cliffs, 1970), 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Russell, 'Free Will and Affirmation: Assessing Honderich's Third Way', in: Gregg D. Caruso (ed.), *Ted Honderich on Consciousness, Determinism, and Humanity* (Cham, 2018), 170.

<sup>49</sup> This comparison between fatalism and hard determinism (in a theological context) is easily deducible from Kyle E. DiRoberts' exposition of the latter, see: Kyle E. DiRoberts, *Prayer, Middle Knowledge, and Divine-Human Interaction* (Eugene, 2018), 7-9.

determinism is not the question of the efficacy of agency (though there is room for disagreement there as soft determinists argue that the future is determined yet human agency is preserved<sup>50</sup>), but the fact that fatalism grounds the determination of events and states of affairs more broadly. Determinism holds that events and states of affairs are determined via causal relations, generally of the natural world, whereas the fatalist is not necessarily committed to that thesis. As Carl Hoefer has noted, this can be illustrated when one tries to “disentangle mystical forces and gods' wills and foreknowledge” from the fixedness of future.<sup>51</sup> Determinists, being concerned with causal laws of nature, are generally not in business of entertaining divine whims as determining forces, whereas fatalists look more broadly to find their deterministic outcomes.<sup>52</sup>

Where do the fatalists look? There are three species of fatalists: logical, causal, and theological. We will examine these individually.

Logical fatalism is by far the most popular and ancient of the formulations. Its lineage as a philosophical idea originates with Aristotle, notably in the famous example of ship-fight. It is committed to the thesis that:

(LF) The truth value of a proposition entails its necessity in the sense that agent action cannot alter the truth value.

To illustrate, prior to considering Aristotle's formulations of the problem, suppose that yesterday it was true that tomorrow that Tariq will go to the garden centre. In other words, the proposition ‘at  $t_3$ , Tariq will go to the garden centre’ is true at  $t_1$ , where  $t_3$  is tomorrow and  $t_1$  is

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<sup>50</sup> On the distinction, see: Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I am not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, 2004), 107-110; cf. Michael McKenna and Derk Pereboom, *Free Will: a Contemporary Introduction* (New York, 2016), 31ff. The term ‘soft determinism’ is altogether an unhelpful one and ought to be universally rejected in favour of ‘compatibilism.’

<sup>51</sup> Carl Hoefer, ‘Causal Determinism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/determinism-causal/#Int>>, (accessed: 01/05/2022).

<sup>52</sup> In this, I am referring to that which is commonly called ‘hard determinism’, as opposed to ‘soft determinism/compatibilism’.



yesterday. The claim is that the truth of that proposition is unchangeable. If it is true at  $t_1$ , it will be true at  $t_2$ , and so on. What one believes about the proposition is irrelevant; what matters is that the proposition is true. Given the truth of proposition in the past, there is nothing one can do to change the truth value in the present. If Tariq were to decide to pass on the garden centre and visit his grandmother instead, the proposition wouldn't have been true at  $t_1$ . As such, there is seemingly a problem at play where it is impossible to change the future, given the immutability of the truth values of propositions. It is a problem of future contingents. In a sense, the term 'logical fatalism' is a misnomer. The problem isn't logical, but metaphysical. The necessity with which the logical fatalist is concerned is not logical, but metaphysical or temporal.

Aristotle was the first to formulate such an argument in his famous Sea Battle. The impact of Aristotle's discussion of the problem is due, in large part, to its alleged connection with Diodorus Cronus' enigmatic Master Argument.<sup>53</sup> The Master argument is a *revision* of the logical fatalist problem that Aristotle considered, and which itself went on to inspire debates concerning future contingents in antiquity.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that Aristotle was not himself a logical fatalist but rather responds to a hypothetical logical fatalist view. The Sea Battle argument appears as follows:

Let me illustrate. A sea-fight must either take place to-morrow or not, but it is not necessary that it should take place to-morrow, neither is it necessary that it should not take place, yet it is necessary that it either should or should not take place to-morrow.

Since propositions correspond with facts, it is evidence that when in future events there

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<sup>53</sup> The argument, as it exists now, is related only in the form of premises and a conclusion by Epictetus, see: Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. Robert Dobbin (London, 2008), ii.19.1. The argument's interpretation has resulted in a vast technical literature, such as: Tomasz Jarmuzek, *On the Sea Battle Tomorrow that May Not Happen: A Logical and Philosophical Analysis of the Master Argument* (Berlin, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> David Sedley, 'Diodorus Cronus', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/diodorus-cronus/>>, (accessed: 21/09/2022).

is a real alternative, and a potentiality in contrary directions, the corresponding affirmation and denial have the same character.<sup>55</sup>

Interpreting this in the context of the chapter is a difficult task since, as D. C. Williams famously quipped, “tracking coherent philosophical arguments in *De Interpretatione* is rather like finding shapes in a cloud.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the work has elicited countless interpretations.<sup>57</sup> William Lane Craig identifies four distinct schools of thought, which I shall term ‘the LEM view’, ‘the temporal necessity view’, ‘the decideability’ view, and ‘the oppositional view’.<sup>58</sup> The LEM view is the standard view, and the view I will endorse. Its defenders include Martha and William Kneale and J. L. Ackrill.<sup>59</sup> Richard Sorabji refers to this as the ‘traditional’ view but such terminology is unhelpful.<sup>60</sup> For our purposes, I will side-step the interpretive debates and offer my own reading of the text without engaging in extensive critical exegesis, with the observation that my own interpretation sits firmly within the standard modern understanding of the text.<sup>61</sup>

First, Aristotle offers an instance of the Law of Excluded Middle, asserting that while neither  $P$  nor  $\sim P$  are necessary,  $(P \vee \sim P)$  is necessary. From this, he proceeds to appeal to a correspondence theory of truth, wherein propositions correspond to facts. This appeal to a correspondence theory of truth is further indicated in Aristotle’s following remark that “[a]n affirmation is the statement of a fact with regard to a subject, and this subject is either a noun or

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<sup>55</sup> *De Interpretatione* 19a30. All quotations are from: Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle Translated in English*, I, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1928).

<sup>56</sup> D. C. Williams, ‘Professor Linsky on Aristotle’, *Philosophical Review* 63 (1954), 253. This passage acquires support as it quoted approvingly at: Anna Dickason, ‘Aristotle, The Sea Fight, and the Cloud’, *Journal of History of Philosophy* 14:1 (1976), 11.

<sup>57</sup> A helpful bibliography and discussion of these interpretations are offered in Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 1-5.

<sup>58</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents From Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden, 1988), 1-5.

<sup>59</sup> See: Aristotle, ‘*Categories*’ and ‘*De Interpretatione*’, ed. J. L. Ackrill (Oxford, 1963), notes; and Martha Kneale and William Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford, 1962), 91-96.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause, and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle’s Theory* (London, 1983), 92; cf. Gail Fine, ‘Truth and Necessity in *De Interpretatione* 9’, *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1:1 (1984), fn.4.

<sup>61</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 2.

that which has no name.”<sup>62</sup> Further evidence is yet found when we, as Anne Dickason has done, observe that Aristotle distinguishes between potential and actual existence.<sup>63</sup> For Aristotle, a proposition does not become true until the corresponding fact or state of affairs has obtained. For example, the proposition ‘there will be a sea-battle tomorrow’ is not necessary because it is neither true nor false. The temptation is to say that, for Aristotle, the proposition retains an indeterminate truth value until a corresponding state of affairs actualises. The difficulty in this is that Aristotle wants to defend a two-valued logic. For example, in 18a30, Aristotle states that all propositions are either true or false. If that’s so, how can the truth value be indeterminate? The answer is not entirely clear. Vaughn McKim has argued that Aristotle’s meaning of ‘indeterminate’ is more akin to undecidable, that the issue is merely epistemic.<sup>64</sup> That reading, however, jars with the correspondence theory. As best as I can decipher the text, Aristotle means to say that a proposition can only have a true or a false truth value but that they can also lack truth values. This, further, seems to entail that Aristotle rejects the principle of bivalence. This makes sense of why Aristotle affirms  $(P \vee \sim P)$  as necessary, by which he would presumably mean ‘necessarily true’ in a logical sense (Aristotle implies as much in 19a25 where he says “it is not always possible to distinguish or state determinately which of these alternatives must necessarily come about.”)<sup>65</sup> He is happy to affirm the necessity of that because it is just applying logical principle to contingent propositions, as opposed being a contingent proposition itself. As such, Aristotle seems to purport to prove that singular future contingent propositions are possibly true and that it is necessarily true that future contingent propositions are possibly true.

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<sup>62</sup> *De Interpretatione*, 19b5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 19b35.

<sup>64</sup> Vaughn R. McKim, ‘Fatalism and the Future: Aristotle’s Way Out’, *The Review of Metaphysics* 25:1 (1971), 80–111.

<sup>65</sup> *De Interpretatione* 19a25.

What has this to do with logical fatalism? Recall our definition of logical fatalism. It is predicated on the assumption that truth values are determinate and fixed. In his Sea-battle example, Aristotle is resisting this assumption by denying that we can assign determinate truth values to singular future contingents. This is seen further in the preceding material in Chapter 9, where Aristotle attacks this logical fatalism, this idea that we can deny that “both deliberation and action are causative with regard to the future”, if we may return to our earlier definitions.<sup>66</sup> As such, Aristotle provides us with our first insight into logical fatalism and a possible solution to it.<sup>67</sup>

A similar trail of thought is found in what is called the Idle Man Argument. Cicero, in his *De Fato*, claims that the argument was named the “*Argos Logos*”, the inactive argument, on the basis that were fatalism accepted, one might as well consign themselves a life of sloth.<sup>68</sup> The clearest statement of the argument is presented in Origen’s mid-third century *Contra Celsum*:

Now that which is called the "idle argument," being a quibble, is such as might be applied, say in the case of a sick man, with the view of sophistically preventing him from employing a physician to promote his recovery; and it is something like this: "If it is decreed that you should recover from your disease, you will recover whether you call in a physician or not; but if it is decreed that you should not recover, you will not recover whether you call in a physician or not. But it is certainly decreed either that you should recover, or that you should not recover; and therefore it is in vain that you call in a physician." Now with this argument the following may be wittily compared: "If it is decreed that you should beget children, you will beget them, whether you have intercourse with a woman or not. But if it is decreed that you should not beget children, you will not do so, whether you have intercourse with a woman or not. Now, certainly,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 19a5.

<sup>67</sup> Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Philosophy of Religion: A Historical Introduction* (Malden, 2007), 106ff.

<sup>68</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Fato*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1982), §28-29.

it is decreed either that you should beget children or not; therefore it is in vain that you have intercourse with a woman." For, as in the latter instance, intercourse with a woman is not employed in vain, seeing it is an utter impossibility for him who does not use it to beget children; so, in the former, if recovery from disease is to be accomplished by means of the healing art, of necessity the physician is summoned, and it is therefore false to say that "in vain do you call in a physician." We have brought forward all these illustrations on account of the assertion of this learned Celsus, that "being a God He predicted these things, and the predictions must by all means come to pass." Now, if by "by all means" he means "necessarily," we cannot admit this.<sup>69</sup>

The argument is expounded more fully in Chapter XX but this argument, attributed to Celsus (unfortunately, Celsus' *Logos Alēthēs* is now extant), and it is earliest theological fatalist argument of which I am aware. However, it is also a logical fatalist argument. The text itself bears some similarity to Aristotle's in form in that it proceeds from a disjunction of two contradictories. Origen is attempting to draw the same distinction as Aristotle: namely, that although a disjunction of two contradictory propositions may be necessarily true, it does not follow that the individual singular contingent propositions therein are necessarily true.

Aristotle asserts that  $\Box (P \vee \sim P)$  or, equivalently,  $\sim \Diamond (P \wedge \sim P)$  is true. That is, 'it is necessary that  $P$  or  $\sim P$ ' is indistinguishable from 'it is not possible that  $P \wedge \sim P$ '. This is a rather uncontroversial claim. It is just the Law of Excluded Middle, which we will carefully delineate from the Principle of Bivalence in chapter 9. . It is necessary that the fight will or will not take place. Origen expresses no explicit commitment to this principle, but it seems implicit.

Aristotle then proceeds to attack the claim that the necessity of this to make inferences about the necessity of future states of affairs. The argument that Aristotle seems to have in mind can

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<sup>69</sup> Origen, 'Against Celsus', in: Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, IV (New York, 1885), 440.

be expressed as follows, where  $P$  denotes ‘it is true that there will be a battle tomorrow’ and  $Q$  denotes ‘there will be a battle tomorrow’

$$1. \Box (P \vee \sim P)$$

$$2. \Box (P \supset Q)$$

$$3. P$$

$$4. \therefore \Box Q$$

The formulation will undoubtedly be subject to disagreement. Yet when we review the Origen passage, we find the argument can be structured in more-or-less the same way. In both cases, the arguments move from the necessity of the disjunction to the necessity of the disjuncts. As we have seen, Aristotle wants to deny premise 3. He wanted to affirm the idea, to use Henri Bergson’s famous phrase, “‘the portals of the future remain wide open’.”<sup>70</sup> By contrast, Origen prefers to note the invalidity of the argument, an insight wrongly attributed as original to Boethius.<sup>71</sup> The inference from premise 2 to the conclusion confuses the fundamental medieval distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *consequentiae*,

Recall our earlier point about the logical fatalist objection being rooted in the necessity of time. The argument outlined above captures this:

1. Necessarily, either (it is true that Tariq will go to the garden centre) or (it is not true that Tariq will go to the garden centre).
2. Necessarily, if (it is true that Tariq will go to the garden centre), (Tariq will go to the garden centre).

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<sup>70</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York, 1911), 105.

<sup>71</sup> See: Craig, *Problems of Divine Foreknowledge*, 26.

3. (It is true that Tariq will go to the garden centre).

4. Therefore, necessarily, Tariq will go to the garden centre.

When the logical fatalist says it is necessary that Tariq will go to the garden centre because the truth value is fixed, they are confusing their modalities. If at  $T_1$ , it is true that at  $T_3$ , Tariq will go to the garden centre, all that follows is premise 2, but that doesn't allow for a valid inference to the conclusion. Necessarily, if it is true that Tariq will go to the garden centre, he will go, but his going may well be contingent. As we can see, then the logical formulation of the fatalist position relies on the assumption of immutable truth values wherein the propositions bearing those truth values are wrongly assigned modal qualifiers. It infers the fixity of the future from the fixity of past truth values. This is the crucial premise that we will return to last.

#### *Causal Fatalism:*

Moving on, causal fatalists are overlooked in the theological literature, but the position can be derived from Peter Van Inwagen in his landmark free will essay.<sup>72</sup> Van Inwagen's essay specifically examines *determinism* but we can adapt Van Inwagen's position to accommodate fatalism. Penelope MacKie has undertaken a similar approach, highlighting the striking similarity between the fatalism and determinist position.<sup>73</sup> The adaption is feasible because both the fatalist and the determinist are going to deny the efficacy of creaturely agency (which has implications for freedom since, as we shall see, freedom involves the ability – and therefore agency – to do otherwise).. The causal fatalist claim is as follows:

Causal Fatalist: Given the deterministic nature of the universe, we cannot control the future.

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Reprint: Oxford, 1986).

<sup>73</sup> Penelope McKie, 'Fatalism, Incompatibilism, and the Power to do Otherwise', *Noûs* 37:4 (2003), 972-76. Van Inwagen himself dedicates a section to fatalism and delineates it from determinism, see: Van Inwagen, *Essay*, 23ff

The idea behind causal fatalism is akin to dominoes. Consider the following passage from Nobel-laureate Richard Feynman:

[E]verything that animals do, atoms do. In other words, there is nothing that living things do that cannot be understood from the point of view that they are made of atoms acting according to the laws of physics.<sup>74</sup>

We, the causal fatalists assert, are nothing more than atoms dancing the laws of the universe, a product of how the cosmological events fell. The Big Bang causes the earth's formation, which caused the process of abiogenesis, which caused evolution, which caused the emergence of *homo sapiens*, which caused my being sat here watching the sunset. Given the deterministic nature of the universe, we cannot control the future. The fact that at 4pm, I will enter my study to read the Nag Hammadi texts is merely the determinate outcome of nature's sequence. This argument has been discussed by Peter Van Inwagen in the form of the consequence argument.<sup>75</sup> It can be formulated as follows (here I am placing John Martin Fischer's summary of van Inwagen's argument into standard form)<sup>76</sup>:

1. If causal determinism obtains and I am free to do other than I actually do, then either I am free so to act that the past would have been other than it actually was or I am free so to act that some natural law which does obtain would not obtain.
2. The past and natural laws are fixed.
3. Therefore, if causal determinism obtains, then I am not now free to do other than I actually do (and thus I lack free will).

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<sup>74</sup> As quoted at: Richard H. Jones, *Reductionism: Analysis and the Fullness of Reality* (Lewisburg, 2000), 169.

<sup>75</sup> Van Inwagen, *Essay*, chapter 3.

<sup>76</sup> John Martin Fischer, 'Review: An Essay on Free Will', *The Philosophical Review* 97:3 (1988), 401-08. I have opted against using van Inwagen's formulation, found on p.16 of his *Essay*, because Fischer's statement is more neatly formulated.



This *modus tollens* asserts, then, that determinism entails incompatibilism and fatalism. This is why we can adapt to argument to denote fatalism; causal determinism implies causal fatalism in that the future is fated by the deterministic causal sequence. Given determinism, the efforts of compatibilists from Thomas Hobbes to Daniel Dennett to rescue freedom from the totalitarian grasp of the cosmological dominos is an exercise in futility to which they are inescapably doomed.<sup>77</sup> As with the logical fatalist argument, it relies on some assertion about the fixity of some feature of the past to support the fatalist claim. In this instance, however, the fixed feature is not the truth value of the proposition, but the past itself and the natural laws. Van Inwagen develops three different versions of this argument but we will focus exclusively on his third formulation: the modal one.<sup>78</sup>

First, van Inwagen introduces the sentential modal operator  $N$  to abbreviate some claim about some  $p$ . Suppose  $p$  states ‘all Welshmen are mortal’.  $Np$ , unabbreviated, would state ‘all Welshmen are mortal and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether all Welshmen are mortal’. As Kadri Vihvelin puts it: “‘ $Np$ ’ abbreviates ‘ $p$  and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether  $p$ ’.”<sup>79</sup> From  $N$ , van Inwagen deduces two principles of inference:

$$\alpha: \Box p \vdash Np$$

$$\beta: N(p \supset q), Np \vdash Nq$$

When Inwagen uses  $\Box$ , what is meant is broadly logical necessity (not to be confused with our broader usage of it earlier). He then introduces  $P$  and  $L$  to denote abbreviations of sentences

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<sup>77</sup> On Hobbes’ and Dennett’s compatibilism, see: Vere Chappell, ‘Introduction’, in: Vere Chappell (ed.), *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity* (Cambridge, 1999), especially xi. Chappell very helpfully contrasts Bramhall and Hobbes’ view with Molina’s libertarianism. On Dennett, see: Daniel C. Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (London, 2003), especially chapters 1–4.

<sup>78</sup> Van Inwagen, *Essay*, chapter 3, especially 93ff for modal version.

<sup>79</sup> Kadri Vihvelin, ‘Arguments for Incompatibilism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-arguments/>, (accessed: 01/09/2022).

expressing some propositions, and outlines that  $P$  denotes some true proposition. From this, the following argument can be constructed from the assumption of determinism:

(1)  $\Box((P \wedge L) \supset P)$ <sup>80</sup> [the definition of determinism]

(2)  $\Box(P \supset (L \supset P))$  [from (1)]

(3)  $N(P \supset L \supset P)$  [from (2), by  $\alpha$ ]

(4)  $NP$  [premise: the past is fixed]

(5)  $N(L \supset P)$  [from (3 and 4, by  $\beta$ ]

(6)  $NL$  [premise: laws of nature are fixed]

(7)  $NP$  [from (5 and 6, by  $\beta$ )<sup>81</sup>

What we see here is an attempted proof to show that if determinism is true, it follows that no-one ever has a choice about any matter. The question with which we are concerned is whether the causal fatalist argument is a version of the logical fatalist argument. It seems it is. As we can see explicitly in (4), the causal fatalist, much like the logical fatalist, uses the fixedness of the past to ascribe fixedness to the future. Secondly, it is apparent that beta is an invalid inference. This has been expertly demonstrated in Thomas McKay and David Johnson's derivation and refutation of the Principle of Agglomeration.<sup>82</sup> They proved that if we accept both alpha and beta, we derive what may be called the principle of agglomeration, which states  $Np, Nq \vdash N(p \wedge q)$ . Given the principle of agglomeration is patently false, either alpha or beta is invalid. Since alpha is evidently true, it follows that beta must be the invalid rule.<sup>83</sup> Does this invalid inference bear any semblance to the invalid inference relied upon by the logical fatalists? Not particularly,

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<sup>80</sup> I have replaced van Inwagen's use of dot notation.

<sup>81</sup> Van Inwagen, *Essay*, 94-95.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas J. McKay and David Johnson, 'A Reconsideration of an Argument Against Compatibilism', *Philosophical Topics* 24:2 (1996), 113-22.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

but there is another inference at play. Recall how we noted that the logical fatalist argument takes some statement about the future uttered in the past. It was the truth of that proposition at  $T_1$  that makes it true at  $T_3$ . However, it seems to me that the causal fatalist argument, including van Inwagen's, makes an analogous claim. It just complexifies the matter by introducing a causal chain. Recall our example: the proposition 'at  $t_3$ , Tariq will go to the garden centre' is true at  $t_1$ , where  $t_3$  is tomorrow and  $t_1$  is yesterday. The causal determinist will accept this claim. The proposition is true precisely because that's how the cosmic dominoes will unfold. At  $T_1$ , the atoms of the universe were moving in such a way that it is inescapable that Tariq will go to the garden centre at  $T_3$ . This is explicable from premises (1) and (3). The difference here that the necessity of Tariq's going to the garden centre is inferred not from the fixity of the truth values of the proposition, but temporal necessity of causal change. What is crucial though is even the causal fatalist maintain the fixity of those truth values from determinism since determinism entails they could not be otherwise.

Consider our domino analogy once more. Imagine a line of 10 dominoes, stood up in a line. If you push the first domino at  $T_1$ , the second will fall at  $T_2$ , the third at  $T_3$ , the fourth at  $T_4$ , and so on. This would entail that the proposition 'At  $T_7$ , domino 7 will fall' is true at  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ ,  $T_3$ , and so on. As such, we can infer from causal determinism that the causal fatalist position is just logical fatalism cloaked in causal relations.

Having shown causal fatalism is a form of logical fatalism, let us turn to the primary focus on this project: theological fatalism. In what follows, I will look at two theological fatalist arguments. That of A. N. Prior and that of Nelson Pike. Theological fatalism broadly, however, can be stated as the view that:

[W]e cannot control the fact that God had the beliefs He had in the past, nor can we control the fact that God is infallible. God's past beliefs together with His infallibility entail the future. Therefore, we cannot control the future.<sup>84</sup>

In his 1962 article 'The Formalities of Omniscience', Manchester philosopher Arthur Prior presented his famous theological fatalist argument based on metric-tense logic. This was developed into a more formal structure in his 1967 'Time and Determinism':

(1) CPmpLPmp

*If it was the case  $m$  time units ago that  $p$ , then necessarily it was the case  $m$  time units ago that  $p$ .*

(2) CPmF(m+n)pLPmF(m+n)p

*If it was the case  $m$  time units ago that it would be the case  $m+n$  time units thence that  $p$ , then necessarily it was the case  $m$  time units ago that it would be the case  $m+n$  time units thence that  $p$ .*

(3) CFnpPmF(m+n)p

*If it will be the case that  $n$  time units hence that  $p$ , then it was that case  $m$  time units ago that it would be the case that  $m+n$  time units thence that  $p$ .*

(4) CFnpLPmF(m+n)p

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<sup>84</sup> Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *God, Knowledge and the Good: Collected Papers in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, 2022), 37.

*If it will be the case  $n$  time units hence that  $p$ , then necessarily it was the case  $m$  time units thence that it would be the case  $m+n$  time units thence that  $p$ .*

(5)  $CLCpqCLpLq$

*If necessarily it is the case that  $p \supset q$ , then it is the case that necessarily  $p \supset$  necessarily  $q$ .*

(6)  $LCPmF(m+n)pFnp$

*Necessarily, if it was the case  $m$  time units ago that it would be the case that case  $m+n$  units thence that  $p$ , then it will be the case  $n$  time units hence that  $p$ .*

(7)  $CLPmF(m+n)pLFnp$

*If necessarily it was the case that  $m$  time units ago that it would be the case  $m+n$  time units thence that  $p$ , then necessarily it will be the case  $n$  time units hence that  $p$ .*

(8)  $CFnpLFnp$ <sup>85</sup>

*If it will be the case  $n$  time units hence that  $p$ , then necessarily it will be the case  $n$  time units hence that  $p$ .*

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<sup>85</sup> Arthur N. Prior, 'The Formalities of Omniscience', *Philosophy* 37:140 (1962), 114–129. I am indebted to Craig for the de-formalized statements.

Despite the fact that Prior's argument is sufficiently formal to attend a black tie gala, its basic form is very similar to our example of Tariq's visit to the garden centre. It takes the fixity of the truth value of some proposition about the future made in the past to postulate necessity. As Prior explains: "propounders of the argument are ascribing to the past, it may be said, is a kind of necessity which is or entails unalterableness."<sup>86</sup> This necessity, led Prior to formulate a law denoting the principle of *quod fuit, non potest non fuisse* (a phrase from Peter of Tarantaise<sup>87</sup>), from which he purported to prove a law of universal pre-determination. For Prior, taking inspiration from Nicholas Rescher's pioneering work on chronological logic,<sup>88</sup> the application of these rules in conjunction with above argument can yield the conclusion that if it is true at *a* that it was the case *n* ago that *p*, it's determined at *a* that it was in fact the case. If we apply this to God, we may say 'if God knew at *a* that it was the case *n* ago that *p*, it is determined (by God) at *a* that it was the case.' Despite the theological bent that Prior applied in constructing his formalisms, the problem he states is nonetheless fundamentally just one about the fixedness of the truth value of past propositions. Indeed, Prior denounces as frivolous the objection that

the past is only unchangeable in the sense that what has been the case will-always have been the case. It is not unchangeable, as we have already seen, in the sense that once a certain proposition, say that 'there will be a sea-battle a day hence', has come to be true, that proposition is bound to stay true. If that proposition was true yesterday, what is bound to be true today is not that there will be a sea-battle a day hence but that there *is* a sea-battle *today*.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Arthur Prior, *Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford, 1967), 119.

<sup>87</sup> Peter of Tatantaise, 'On the Eternity of the World', in: Richard C. Dales and Omar Agerami (eds.), *Medieval Latin Texts on the Eternity of the World* (Leiden, 1991), 65.

<sup>88</sup> Prior mentions Rescher's work on dated and tensed calculus but provides no citation. Presumably, Prior is referring to Rescher's 'On the Logic of Chronological Propositions', *Mind* 75:279 (1966), 75-96.

<sup>89</sup> Prior, *Past, Present, and Future*, 'Time and Determinism', 119-20.

The goal here is not to assess whether Prior's argument is correct. As Peircean, his answer to the problem is simply that future singular contingent propositions are false, though his meaning is queer in that he does not so much take issue with the view that such propositions neither true nor false (Aristotle's view), but rather says in such cases of indeterminacy, such propositions should be considered false. What suffices for now is to note that Prior's theological fatalism is reducible to logical fatalism. It shares the same form of deriving the necessity of future propositions from the temporal necessity that stems from past propositions about the future.

Finally, Nelson Pike's formulation of theological fatalism is the most famous and well-cited. Although it is difficult to disagree with William Lane Craig's assertion that "Nelson Pike's development of theological fatalism is a mare's nest of confusion",<sup>90</sup> Pike does kindly furnish us with a standard form of the theological fatalism, which he develops from what he takes to be six assumptions relied upon by Boethius. The argument is as follows:<sup>91</sup>

- (1) 'Yahweh is omniscient and Yahweh exists at T1' entails that 'If Jones does A at T2, then Yahweh believes at T1 that Jones does A at T2'.
- (2) If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient, then 'Yahweh believes P' entails P.
- (3) It is not within one's power at a given time so to act that both 'P' and 'not-P' are true.
- (4) It is not within one's power at a given time so to act that something believed by an individual at a time prior to the given time was not believed by that individual at the prior time.

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<sup>90</sup> Craig, *Foreknowledge*, 165.

<sup>91</sup> Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (London, 1970), 59-60. I have here omitted Pike's bracketed references to Boethius' assumptions (which, he notes, Boethius himself was not committed to and in some cases explicitly rejects). Pike prefers to use the term 'Yahweh', Wilhelm Gesenius' reconstruction of the pronunciation of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton (יהוה), to denote 'God'.

- (5) It is not within one's power at a given time so to act that an individual existing at a time prior to the given time did not exist at the prior time.
- (6) If Yahweh believes at T1 that Jones does A at T2, then if it is within Jones's power at T2 to refrain from doing A then either: (1) It was within Jones's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh believed P at T1 and 'P' is false; or (2) it was within Jones's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh did not believe as He did believe at T2; or (3) it was within Jones's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh did not exist at T1.
- (7) If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient, then the first alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from lines 2 and 3). [Read 'lines' as 'premise']
- (8) The second alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from line 4).
- (9) The third alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from line 5).
- (10) Therefore: If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient and believes at T1 that Jones does A at T1, then it was not within Jones's power at T2 to refrain from doing A (from lines 6 and 7-9).
- (11) Therefore: If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient and exists at T1, then if Jones does A at T2, it was not within Jones's power to refrain from doing A (from lines 10 and 1).

From this, Pike remarks: "If God exists (i.e., if some individual bears the title 'God'), no human is voluntary."<sup>92</sup> The argument, then, is predicated on the idea that if God infallibly knows what circumstance C will obtain at some future time T<sub>1</sub>, then C must obtain at T<sub>1</sub> because if it were not to obtain, God would be wrong, which is impossible if He is infallible. In the words of the late Doris Day's iconic 1956 single 'Que Será Será', whatever will be, will be. For present purposes, I do not wish to assess the merits of this fatalist argument. This is firstly because Pike himself does not commit himself to the argument, noting that "[i]t would be a

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 61.



mistake to think that commitment to determinism is an unavoidable implication of the Christian concept of divine omniscience.”<sup>93</sup> Although Liran Shia Gordon has declared that theological fatalism “belongs to the hall of unsolvable philosophical riddles”,<sup>94</sup> Pike does not regard the problem as unsolvable. On the contrary, Pike argues, “a rather wide range of alternatives [are] open to the theologian” in solving the dilemma.<sup>95</sup> We will explore these in due course. For now, the interest is in the structure of the argument. Notice that like logical and causal fatalism, Pike’s theological fatalism hinges on the fixedness of the truth of past propositions about the future since in his argument God’s prior belief about the future are fixed, entailing that the future is also fixed. The logical fatalist argument relies on prior propositions about the future being determinately true, as does the causal fatalist argument, and Pike’s theological fatalist position does too. In other words, Pike’s theological fatalist argument is simply of the same structure as logical fatalism, thus refuting logical fatalism will refute theological fatalism and causal fatalism by implication. In order for a theological fatalist argument to avoid being structurally and logically equivalent to theological fatalism (i.e. reducible to it), it must be formulated in such a way that it is not predicated on the necessity of the past. Pike fails to formulate his argument in such a way.

What this also means is that if we can show that the premise of these logical fatalist arguments is mistaken, we can kill the theological fatalist argument before it even gets off the ground.

Craig explains:

Therefore, it seems to me that the problem of theological fatalism is reducible to a statement of purely logical fatalism involving no reference to God or any knower. Such an argument would be based on the temporal necessity of some proposition like ‘It was

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<sup>93</sup> Nelson Pike, ‘Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action’, *The Philosophical Review* 74:1 (1965), 46.

<sup>94</sup> Liran Shia Gordon, ‘On the Co-nowness of Time and Eternity: a Scotist Perspective’, *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 7:1-2 (2016), 30.

<sup>95</sup> Pike, ‘Divine Omniscience’, 46.

the case that  $p'$  where  $p$  is a future-tense proposition. Since the past is unalterable, no one has it within his power to make it such that it was not the case that  $p$ . Since 'It was the case that  $p$ ' entails ' $p$ ', it follows that that ' $p$ ' is necessarily true. If the argument for theological fatalism is cogent, then so is this argument; and if this argument can be shown to be defective, then the proof for theological fatalism must also be unsound.<sup>96</sup>

### *Attacking the Logical Fatalist Position*

The approach here for the theist should be two-fold. First, the theist should raise questions about the cost of the theological fatalist position. While theological fatalism is no doubt a welcome weapon in the arsenal of the anti-theist position, the aforementioned highlights that it comes with a cost: to assert theological fatalism is to assert logical fatalism – and few philosophers are willing to do that. To defend logical fatalism is not such to bite the bullet as it is to swallow the whole armoury in this case. This consideration takes much of the sting out of logical fatalism.

Second, there is scope to simply refute the logical fatalist presupposition. One promising method of doing this to show that the inference in the core premise, that the necessity of the past imposes necessity on the future, is fallacious. Let us use a new example to illustrate the logical fatalist perspective in addition to the Tariq example: 'It is true that John will make a coffee.' If that statement is true at any point in time prior to John's making a coffee, it cannot become false. John must, by some necessity, make a coffee. It is fated for John to make a coffee. In other words, necessarily John will make a coffee.

This seems plausible but there is something amiss here. Where has that necessity come from? The fatalist will argue it stems from the necessity of the past but logically the inference does not hold. All one can infer from 'John will make a coffee' is that John will make a coffee. There is

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<sup>96</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 32.

no logical inference to say that necessarily John will make a coffee. It is true, of course, that necessarily, if John will make a coffee, then John will make a coffee, but that is a different proposition altogether – and certainly not sufficient to carry the fatalist’s point. As such, the logical fatalist’s whole view trades on a logical fallacy.

To be clearer on this point, the trouble with the fatalist view is that it is conflating counterfactual necessity with logical necessity. By ‘counterfactual necessity’, I simply mean the sort of necessity that arises from entailments whereby the consequent of a counterfactual must be true if the antecedent is satisfied. As Quentin Smith notes, this sort of necessity is entirely fangless in regard to creaturely freedom. It just entails that no creature can defy the laws of logic.<sup>97</sup> By contrast, ‘logical necessity’ is far more pernicious and entails that the truth of the antecedent in a counterfactual makes the consequent necessarily true but this is, of course, without merit. That ‘the cat will walk across the fence’ is true does not entail that ‘necessarily, the cat will walk across the fence’.

It is difficult to see how a logical fatalist would respond to this. Unless one denies the laws of logic and renders a fallacious inference valid, this is as close to a knock-down argument as one can get. If one is to affirm the fixity of the future based on the temporal necessity of the past, one has to commit themselves to logically fallacious reasoning.

One attempt to avoid this necessity of the past is posited by Richard Taylor.<sup>98</sup> Taylor argues for a form of logical fatalism that does not rely on that fallacious assumption. Taylor’s argument appeals instead to so-called ‘conditions of power’ to make his case. The argument runs as follows:

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<sup>97</sup> Quentin Smith, ‘Review: Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom by William Lane Craig’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53:2 (1993), 493.

<sup>98</sup> Richard Taylor, ‘Fatalism’, *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962), 56–66.

1. Any proposition whatever is either true, or if not true, false.
2. If any state of affairs is sufficient for, though logically unrelated to, the occurrence of some further condition at the same time or any other time, then the former cannot occur without the latter occurring also.
3. If the occurrence of any condition is necessary for, though logically unrelated to, the occurrence of some other condition at the same time, or any other time, then the latter cannot occur without the former occurring also.
4. If one condition or set of conditions is sufficient for (ensures) another, then the other is necessary (essential) for it, and conversely, if one condition or set of conditions is necessary (essential) for another, then that other is sufficient for (ensures) it.
5. No agent can perform any given act if there is lacking, at the same time or any other time, some condition necessary for the occurrence of that act.
6. Time is not by itself “efficacious”; that is, the mere passage of time does not augment or diminish the capacities of anything and, in particular, it does not enhance or decrease an agent’s powers or abilities.<sup>99</sup>

At first glance, the presumptions are uncontroversial. For example, the first one simply affirms the principle of bivalence. Yet Taylor then utilises them into a more potent argument:

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<sup>99</sup> I have reproduced this argument *verbatim* from Hugh Rice, ‘Fatalism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018, < <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/fatalism/#3> >, (accessed: 21/09/2022); cf. Richard Taylor, ‘Fatalism’, *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962), 56–66.

If  $P$  is true, then it is not in my power to do  $S'$  (for if  $P$  is true, then there is, or was, lacking a condition essential for my doing  $S'$ , the condition, namely, of there being no sea-battle yesterday).

But if  $P'$  is true, then it is not in my power to do  $S$  (for a similar reason).

But either  $P$  is true or  $P'$  is true

So, either it is not in my power to do  $S$  or it is not in my power to do  $S'$ .<sup>100</sup>

In the above  $P$  denotes some proposition about the past (with  $P'$  as its opposite) and  $S$  refers to some act that in an agent's power to do something of which  $P$  is a condition, with  $S'$  as its opposite. If it were true that Liz Truss became Prime Minister yesterday, then it is not in my power to read a newspaper that says she did not become Prime Minister yesterday (assuming newspapers are not publishing falsehoods). Yet if it is true that Liz Truss did not become Prime Minister yesterday, it is not in my power to read in the newspaper that she did. Yet either Truss became Prime Minister yesterday or she did not. So, it is either not in my power to read a newspaper that says she became Prime Minister yesterday or it is not in my power to read a newspaper that says she did not become Prime Minister yesterday. Taylor's move is then to substitute 'yesterday' for 'tomorrow' and then replace  $P$  with some performative act, like making Truss the Prime Minister. Once that is inputted into the argument, we end up with the fatalistic conclusion of either it is not in my power to make Liz Truss Prime Minister tomorrow or it is not in my power to *not* making Truss the Prime Minister tomorrow.<sup>101</sup>

*Prima facie*, Taylor manages to avoid the conflation of *necessitas consequentiae* and *necessitas consequentis* while still providing an account of logical fatalism which can be adapted in

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

theological fatalism. If his argument is sound, then we cannot kill off the theological fatalist threat of his argument by taking down standard logical fatalist views. However, there are three reasons to reject Taylor's argument.

First, as we shall see when the synthesis of Thomism and Molinism is introduced, I will question the principle of bivalence as a straightforward principle. As such, it is far from clear that the first assumption that Taylor provides, intuitive though it is, will stand up to scrutiny.

Second, Taylor's fifth assumption - no agent can perform any given act if there is lacking, at the same time or any other time, some condition necessary for the occurrence of that act - is suspect at best and question-beginning at worst. Taylor's defence of this assumption seems slick:

This follows, simply from the idea of anything being essential for the accomplishment of something else. I cannot, for example, live without oxygen, or swim five miles without ever having been in water, or read a given page of print without ever having learned Russian, or win a certain election without ever having been nominated, and so on.<sup>102</sup>

Taylor is quite right that necessary conditions for action must be met in order to undertake that action but the examples that Taylor give do not really comport with what the argument says. As both Rice and Craig diagnose, Taylor's argument seems to actually assert that if I do not perform some action, that non-performance is due to the absence of some necessary condition.<sup>103</sup> In Rice's words, it entails the implausible claim that "I never have the power to perform any act which I do not actually perform."<sup>104</sup> Yet, of course, there actions that we not

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<sup>102</sup> Taylor, 'Fatalism', 58.

<sup>103</sup> Rice, 'Fatalism'; and Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, chapter 7.

<sup>104</sup> Rice, 'Fatalism'.

perform yet have the power to do so. As such, Taylor's argument collapses and ceases to be a viable logical fatalist account. Worse, it seems to beg the question insofar as the fifth presumption almost assumes fatalism.

Thirdly, it is unclear that Taylor avoids the necessity of the past. Charles D. Brown has noted that Taylor shifts the concept of necessity in the argument. Taylor switches his argument from logical necessity to practical, or causal, necessity, especially when dealing with the fifth presupposition. Thus, Brown demonstrates, when Taylor shifts the argument from 'yesterday' to 'tomorrow', he commits a fallacy:

Where, then does the argument derive its apparent force? The occurrence of the naval battle in the first situation is, in addition to being the logical necessary condition, the practical antecedent necessary condition, whereas in the second situation it is, additionally, the practical consequential necessary condition. The "force" of the argument depends merely upon Taylor's (or his readers') transferring the practical necessity, per se, along with the logical necessity from the first situation to the second.<sup>105</sup>

This implication of Brown's analysis is that far from avoiding the fallacious shifting of necessities seen in other logical fatalist arguments, Taylor implicitly trades off on it. If Taylor's argument did not make the implicit shift in modal meanings, the fatalist consequences for the argument would dissipate. Craig's criticism is similar but has a distinct flavour, arguing Taylor is – in the same way as Pike does – confusing logical necessity with counterfactual dependency, the latter of which is harmless for creaturely freedom.<sup>106</sup> Craig is somewhat unclear but I take it he means that when Taylor says S is necessary for P, the modal dynamic at play there is counterfactual insofar as if it were not for S, then P'. This seems to be correct.

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<sup>105</sup> Charles D. Brown, 'Fallacies in Taylor's "Fatalism"', *Journal of Philosophy* 62:13 (1965), 352.

<sup>106</sup> Craig, *Divine Providence*, 160–61.

In summary, it is clear that theological fatalism is simply a form of logical fatalism. The arguments rely on the same fallacious premises. As such, it is not even necessary to provide an account of providence that refutes the theological fatalist position since the position is dead on its feet. Given that logical fatalism is also a more challenging view to refute than theological fatalism,<sup>107</sup> the collapsing of these two-prongs simultaneously provides assurance that future formulations of fatalist dilemmas are unlikely to be successful.

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Rea, *Metaphysics: The Basics* (Abingdon, 2014), 172.



## Chapter 2: On What Freedom *Is*

In K. A. Bedford's 2008 science fiction novel *Time Machines Repaired While-U-Wait*, the following exchange unfolds:

To change the subject, he said, "I've been thinking a lot."

"What about?"

"Free will."

"Free will?"

"Yeah," he said, trying not to fidget, a weird feeling in his head. "I reckon free will is bullshit."

"You need to get some sleep, Spider."

"No, no, I feel okay, more or less."

"Free will," she said, shaking her head.

"It's an illusion. That's all it is. Everything is already sorted out, every decision, every possibility, it's all determined, scripted, whatever."

Iris was looking at him as if she was worried. "Where'd all this come from?"

"I've been to the End of bloody Time, Iris. From that perspective, everything is done and settled. Basically, everything that could happen has happened. It's all mapped out, documented, diagrammed, written up in great big books, and ignored."

"You're a crazy bastard, you know that, Spider?"

"Maybe not crazy enough," he said.

Iris was still struggling for traction in the conversation. "You think everything is predetermined? Is that it? But what about—"

"No. You just think you have free will."

"So, according to you," Iris said, looking bewildered, "a guy who kills his wife was

always going to kill her. She was always going to die.”

“From his point of view, he doesn’t know that, and neither does she, but yeah. She was always a goner, so to speak.”

“There is no way I can accept this,” she said. “It’s intolerable. It robs individual people of moral agency. According to you nobody chooses to do anything; they’re just following a script. That means nobody’s responsible for anything.”

“I said free will is an illusion. We think we’ve got moral agency, we think we make choices. It’s a perfect illusion. It just depends on your point of view.”

“It’s a bloody pathway to madness, I reckon,” Iris said.

“I dunno,” he said. “Right now, sitting here, thinking about everything, I think it makes a lot of sense. Kinda, anyway.”

“Think you’ll find that’s just an illusion,” she said, and flashed a tiny smile.<sup>108</sup>

This exchange is not particularly divorced from philosophical perspectives on free will. Spider’s view, for example, is a variant of the deterministic reductive physicalism that is, perhaps, the most popular view among philosophers working on free will. Alex Rosenberg, the philosopher of science, recognizes the potency of this intuition that we are free but says it is ultimately falsified by science, arguing “[a]ll the real resistance to science’s denial of free will comes from introspection.”<sup>109</sup> For Rosenberg and his intellectual bedfellows, Spider’s claim is true. Free will does not exist. It is merely illusory. Of course, not all of those committed to this denial are reductive physicalists, but all agree that this alleged apprehension of our own free will ought to be disposed of in favour of a recognition of the claim that we are all, in effect, at the mercy of something beyond ourselves. Our every decision, action, and even thought is in some way externally determined. As we have seen, the theological fatalist dilemma proceeds on this same

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<sup>108</sup> K. A. Bedford, *Time Machines Repaired While U-Wait* (Online, 2008), 271-72.

<sup>109</sup> Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist’s guide to Reality: Enjoying Life Without Illusions* (New York, 2011), 238; passim.

premise. In this chapter, I intend on expounding what it is to be a free agent and explain the motivation for accepting such an account. To that end, I intend to engage with the perennial questions: What is human freedom? What does it mean for a creature to be able to act freely? Can a creaturely act freely?

Philosophers have, broadly speaking, divided into three different schools of thought on that question.

The first school of thought is determinism, usually – but not necessarily – construed as causal determinism. In the broadest sense, determinism is the view that the future of the world is fixed such that there is only one possible outcome.<sup>110</sup> Alternatively put, as by Robert Kane, “the determined event occurs in every logically possible world in which the determining conditions (e.g. antecedent physical causes plus laws of nature) obtain.”<sup>111</sup> In relation to free agency, this usually manifests as the claim that we are physically and/or psychologically determined to act in a fixed way. For example, if I were able to identify all of your neural activity, I would – in theory – be able to know what you are going to do. You are without agency. Your actions are determined by the neural activity, which – in turn – might be determined by the pre-determined movement of atoms.

The second view is compatibilism or, to use the term previously noted to be unhelpful, soft determinism. This is the most popular view among philosophers today.<sup>112</sup> Compatibilism holds that determinism and free will are both true features of the world but they are mutually consistent. It is the Hovis 50/50 ‘Best of Both’ of the determinism-free will debate.

Compatibilism takes many forms. For example, one view – described by Michael Preciado - is

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<sup>110</sup> Roy Weatherford, *The Implications of Determinism* (Abingdon, 2017), 3.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Kane, ‘Introduction: The Contours of Contemporary Free Will Debates’, in: Robert Kane (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; New York, 2011), 4.

<sup>112</sup> See: David Bourget and David Chalmers, ‘Philosophers on Philosophy: The 2020 PhilPapers Survey’, 2021, < <https://philarchive.org/archive/BOUPOP-3> >, (accessed: 21/09/2022). Note: this is a draft paper but the data is sound.

that compatibility has to be *metaphysical*, just causal or logical.<sup>113</sup> This view works with Aquinas' and Molina's views, but as I argued that fatalism and determinism are intricately linked in the previous chapter, I believe it is preferable to set it aside for a libertarian conception of freedom, whereby there is a third stronger conception of free will.

In this thesis, I claim that to be able to act freely is to act otherwise. In that, I defend a libertarian account of freedom that relies on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities PAP, which Tobias Hoffmann and Cyril Michon have convincingly argued that Aquinas subscribed to.<sup>114</sup> If an agent's decision is, properly speaking, sourced within the agent and they could have done otherwise, then I take it that involves – at least in principle – the agent being able to act upon alternative possibilities. This would mean, for example, that although an agent's conscience might behave them act a certain way, such that they would never act in an alternative way, they still – in principle – have the capacity to act otherwise. For example, suppose John truly believes he would never be able torture a man. The thought of it is sufficiently sickening that he would not be able to bring himself to deploy a means of sadism. Yet, clearly, John could in a looser sense could clearly torture a fellow human being, just as an alcoholic can in theory choose to resist the intense impulse to consume alcohol.<sup>115</sup>

While I argue that freedom entails the PAP for humans, it entails a somewhat different degree of agency for God since God, unlike humans, is a necessary being whose nature is absolute. I assume, in line with our Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being, that God is perfectly good. That perfect goodness entails that God can only do good or, perhaps,

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<sup>113</sup> Michael Patrick Preciado, *A Reformed View of Freedom: the Compatibility of Guidance Control and Reformed Theology* (Eugene, 2019), 141.

<sup>114</sup> Tobias Hoffmann and Cyril Michon, 'Aquinas on Free Will and Intellectual Determinism', *Philosophers' Imprint* 17:10 (2017), 3–15.

<sup>115</sup> I do not wish to push this alcoholism analogy too far since conscience and alcoholism proceed from very different processes. The salient analogical point is merely that intense internal feeling is not sufficient to constitute a violation of freedom in that particular sense.

only act in such a way as to produce the maximum good. This latter contention is plausible but uncertain. I see no persuasive reason for why God must only and always produce the maximum good, whatever that is. ‘Whatever that is’ is a not merely a tongue in cheek remark but an observation that this maximization is a conceptual mess.<sup>116</sup> God’s action, then, is free not just in that it is not externally determined, but that He can act volitionally. His choices come from within Himself. He is neither coerced nor compelled in how he acts by something other than Himself; rather, He is compelled by His own nature to act in a certain way. As a result, God is free in that, like humans, He has choice between possibilities but these choices are constrained by His essence. God can choose between possible worlds, provided they are equally good, but that choice does not extend broadly. For example, God cannot choose to do evil. He is not faced with that genuine possibility because He is, by nature, incapable of such evil. It would entail a logical contradiction whereas in the human case it would merely entail psychological compulsion. As such, God’s freedom only entails the power to choose between good possibilities, not the power to do anything. In sense, then, God has less freedom than humans, morally speaking, since His alternative possibilities are more morally restrained by His own nature. He cannot choose alternatives that are evil. Given that God being able to genuinely choose to do evil is a logical contradiction, such a claim should be as readily dismissed as the claim that God can create a rock too heavy for Him to lift.<sup>117</sup> However, arguably, this more morally restricted freedom is superior since the ability to choose evil is not necessarily a

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<sup>116</sup> Laura Garcia, ‘Moral Perfection’, in: Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, 2009), 222. Garcia uses this conceptual difficulty to attack the free will defense. Briefly, let me note that I think that move is mistaken for the defense merely requires that God has morally sufficient reasons pertaining to free will to permitting evil. It might invoke maximalisation but it certainly does not rely on it.

<sup>117</sup> On God’s inability to do the logically impossible, see (for example): Bruce R. Reichenbach, *Divine Providence: God’s Love and Human Freedom* (Eugene, 2016), 141; Antony Flew, *There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed his Mind* (New York, 2007), 157; Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?* (Oxford, 2003), 7; Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.25, A.4; C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, 1962), 26ff; and Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids, 1990), 69. This is undoubtedly the consensus view among philosophers of religion and theologians.

positive feature. This view taps into Barth's delineation of divine freedom and creaturely freedom, and captures Barth's recognition that God's freedom is superior in that it is restricted by His perfectly good essence (of which laws of logic are a constituent part).<sup>118</sup> To be clear, then, freedom is found in the ability to do otherwise.

There are two primary motivations or justifications for accepting this view: our phenomenological experience (as we alluded to in response to Rosenberg), particularly intentionality; and the necessity of such freedom for moral accountability.

In regard to the first, our phenomenological experience of free agency, the above exchange is revealing. We can ask: Why is Spider's claim so offensive to our common sense? The answer is because it contradicts our experience. The claim we are not free is as strange to opposed to our experience of the world. This idea has been articulated potently in a recent work by Christian List, one of the foremost writers on free agency:

[F]ree will is at the heart of our self-conception as agents capable of deliberating our actions. Unless our choices are up to us, there is little point in asking, "What should I do?" When we deliberate about how to act – what career path to take, what projects to pursue, whom to marry, whether to help someone in need – we must recognize the different options as genuine possibilities among which we can choose. Otherwise, deliberation would be pointless. Our sense of agency is inextricably bound up with the idea that we are capable of making real choices, at least in principle.<sup>119</sup>

As agents, it seems that we have intentions, things that we mean to do. We reflect, evaluate, survey options, form intentions, and act. Our experience of the world as agents is of meaning to do things. We experience the world as though we are free. I mean to (i.e., I intend to) wash the

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<sup>118</sup> On Barth, see: Matthew J. Aragon Bruce, 'Election', in: Paul Dafydd Jones and Paul T. Nommo (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth* (Oxford, 2019), 320.

<sup>119</sup> Christian List, *Why Free Will is Real* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), 2.

car. I mean to cross the road. Every aspect of my experience indicates that I have intentions and can freely act upon them, or refrain from them, in such a way that I am not causally determined. As such, our phenomenological experience of agency, and the view that we are free, is as basic a belief as belief in the external world. In the absence of a defeater, it seems acceptable to affirm free will on the basis of said experience as a foundational, or properly basic, belief. In G. E. Moore's 'Here is one hand' argument, he appeals to our *prima facie* authority of our experience. I experience a hand, therefore, I should – in the absence of some defeater – conclude there is a hand.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, in regards to freedom of will, the experience, the sense, that I could do otherwise is pervasive. If I say, 'I *could have* ordered a hot chocolate rather than a cappuccino', that utterance is wholly supported by my experience. When I reach out my hand, I cannot convince myself that that was not a free choice. The sense that I could have done otherwise is so overwhelming.

Standard objections to this sort of view claims that these phenomenological experiences are illusory. Neuroscientific evidence, most famously provided by Ben Libet in his study of neuro-electrical predictors of volition, is mustered to deny that we could have done otherwise.<sup>121</sup> It is far beyond the scope of this project to examine all the neuroscientific criticisms of the free will position but regarding the Libet-style experiments we can note that the move from the Libet experiments to the denial of free will is an unwarranted inference. The fact that one experiences neuro-electrical activity prior to the conscious decision to exercise volition does not entail that the volition was exclusively the product of the neuro-electrical activity, quite apart from any free will. Max Velmans notes that this confuses the ontology of conscious states with

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<sup>120</sup> G. E. Moore, 'Proof of an External World', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25 (1939), 273-300.

<sup>121</sup> On the Libet experiments, see: Benjamin Libet, 'Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action', *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 8:4 (1985), 529-566; and Benjamin Libet, Curtis A. Gleason, Elwood W. Wright, and Dennis K. Pearl, 'Time of Conscious Intention to Act in Relation to Onset of Cerebral Activity (Readiness-Potential) – The Unconscious Initiation of a Freely Voluntary Act', *Brain* 106: 3 (1983), 623-642; and Benjamin W. Libet, 'Do we have Free Will?', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6:8-9 (1999), 47-57.

the causal states. He writes: “the [neuro-electrical] causes and correlates of conscious experience should not be confused with their ontology [...] the *only* evidence about what conscious experiences are like comes from first-person sources, which consistently suggest consciousness to be something other than or additional to neuronal activity.”<sup>122</sup> In other words, whatever the electrical activity in the brain and how it relates to our conscious decision-making, that it is a separate question from what conscious experience *is*. Our only insight into what it is our phenomenological experience, which supports the PAP account of freedom I am defending. To illustrate this with an example, suppose I raise my hand in the air. Whatever happens in my brain in neurophysical terms, that does not show that that neurophysical phenomena determines the raising of my hand to the detriment of being able to do otherwise. It is possible, for example, the raising of the hand is an exercise of free will and the brain activity is a secondary effect of that. As such, we have, at least, *prima facie* justification for accepting free will.

In regard to moral accountability, I take the Kantian axiom that ‘ought implies can’ to be true. This principle seems sufficiently uncontroversial among ethicists that we can limit ourselves to only a cursory justification by way of a common thought experiment. Suppose that you are walking beside a lake and lo and behold, you witness a child drowning. The intuitive normative implication of that is that you *ought* to save the child. If you were to continue on your merry way as the child perished, it is plausible to infer that you have in some way abdicated your moral duty. However, let’s furnish the example with some additional information: it transpires that you cannot swim and, were you to attempt to save the child, you would almost certainly drown yourself. With that new information, the claim that you ought to save the child not only ceases to be plausible, but it becomes implausible. It does not make much sense to say you have a duty to save a life that you cannot save, no matter how much you want to. The question then

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<sup>122</sup> Max Velmans, *Understanding Consciousness* (London, 2000), 34f.



arises as to why that normative duty dissipates when the fact you lack the ability to do otherwise. Given that all that has changed with the introduction of new information is that you cannot save the child, we can deduce that to say you ought to do something, that you have a moral duty or obligation to do something, requires that you can actually do that thing. Ergo, ‘ought implies can’. This has great *prima facie* plausibility and coheres well with our moral intuitions. Indeed, this is not limited to moral imperatives. It is difficult to think of any example where one plausibly ought to do something when they, in fact, cannot. For example, if you are driving along at 60mph and a man runs across the single carriageway about 120ft in front of your car, it would make little sense if someone were to say you ought to have stopped before striking the man with your vehicle precisely because it would not be possible for you to stop in time. It is bizarre to say you ought to have stopped given you were not able to stop as a matter of physics.

In a thoughtful 1991 article, Dale Jacquette attempted to cast doubt on the Kantian principle, arguing that it “cannot be admitted because of its collision with considered moral judgements.”<sup>123</sup> Jacquette’s argument relies on conjunctive and disjunctive obligation scenarios, though it is noteworthy that he eventually concedes that Kant’s principle ought not be rejected despite its shortcomings. He writes:

The principle counterintuitively makes a dilemma agent's efforts to act according to disjunctive obligations supererogatory, and paradoxically implies that no causally incompatible dilemma actions will occur. Kant's ought-can principle has unacceptable consequences; but to reject it in standard deontic logic is to eliminate the only apparently protection against logical inconsistency.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Dale Jacquette, ‘Moral Dilemmas, Disjunctive Obligations, and Kant’s Principle that “ought” implies “can”’, *Synthese* 88:1 (1991), 43–55.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Jacquette invites us to Buridan's Ass-type scenario.<sup>125</sup> Suppose there are two identical twins at risk of being crushed to death by a heavy rock but are pinned down by said rock in such a way that one of the twin children can be pulled free at one time. However, as soon as one child is pulled free, the weight of the rock will shift and result in the other child's demise. If neither child is pulled out promptly, the rock will fatally crush them both. In this scenario, there is – assuming the agent in the dilemma has some equal moral responsibility for both twins – an obligation to save each of the twins. Kant's maxim, Jacquette argues, says that because you ought to save the first twin *T* because you can do so. We should note here that the mere fact you can do so does not generate such a duty necessarily, but the point is that Kant's principle does not absolve you that duty on the basis of your capacity to act so as to fulfil what is ostensibly your duty to save the child. However, under the same principle, you have a duty to save *T'* on identical grounds. Subscription to the principle of 'ought implies can' then entails deontic contrariety, a claim that Jacquette demonstrates by formalising the problem. Jacquette continues:

If the guardian is obligated to do A under circumstances C, and if it is causally impossible to do both A and A' then the guardian is obligated not to do A'. Similarly, if it is obligatory to do A', and doing A prevents doing A', then it is obligatory not to do A. (If I am obligated to attend the opera in Vienna, and if it is causally impossible for me to make curtain time if I travel to Santiago, then I am obligated not to travel to Santiago.)<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> This paradox is concisely explained in: Mark Skousen and Kenna C. Taylor, *Puzzles and Paradoxes in Economics* (Cheltenham, 1997), chapter 24.

<sup>126</sup> Jacquette, 'Moral Dilemmas', 44.

Moral philosophers, rightly, have argued that we can resolve this problem by construing them as disjunctive obligations by choosing one option. For example, if two children fall out of a boat, the mother who jumps in to save them does not err morally on the basis of which child she reaches for first. Jacquette acknowledges this, quoting Alan Donagan's noteworthy claim that "every serious rationalist moral system" takes this stance.<sup>127</sup> However, Jacquette thinks this is inadequate to resolve the issue: "It can be shown that if Kant's principle is invoked, then  $\sim O(A \vee A'/C)$  and  $\sim (O(A/C) \vee O(A'/C))$ , that neither version of disjunctive obligation holds true in the dilemma situation."<sup>128</sup> As such, he argues, Kant's principle is at odds with our considered moral judgements that we can construe the problem in terms of disjunctive, rather than conjunctive, obligation.

First of all, we should agree with Jacquette that Kant's principle needs to be preserved for two reasons: (i) to preserve inconsistency in standard deontic logic; and (ii) the apparent difficulty it leads to when considering conjunctive versus disjunctive problems does not alter the fact that it is as common sense a moral axiom as we can hope to find. It is preferable to retain Kant's principle and work out how to reconcile it with the seemingly counter-intuitive consequences that Jacquette elucidates than to reject the principle and end up with scores of counter-intuitive consequences. In a later work, Jacquette seems to become more headstrong, stating: "if there is no more satisfactory way for Kant's principle to be implemented, then the ought-can principle must be rejected out of hand as incapable of resolving moral dilemmas."<sup>129</sup> However, Jacquette seems oblivious to his change of tone and offers no reason to reject Kant's reason on grounds (i) and (ii).

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<sup>127</sup> Alan Donagan, 'Consistency in Rationalist Moral Systems', *The Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984), 307. I do not wish to defend this claim in any unqualified sense but it is correct, broadly speaking. For example, an act utilitarian – whether they accept Kant's maxim or not – is going to find more utility in saving one child than neither.

<sup>128</sup> Jacquette, 'Disjunctive Obligations', 47.

<sup>129</sup> Dale Jacquette, 'Obligations under Causal Constraints', *Synthese* 99:2 (1994), 307.

Second, it is not clear that Jacquette is interpreting Kant's principle correctly, a point that B. H. Slater has acknowledged.<sup>130</sup> Slater argues that the premises of Jacquette's modus tollens argument for the claim that the Kantian principle is incongruent with common sense moral intuitions do not stand up to scrutiny because Jacquette ignores pertinent temporal distinctions. Without regurgitating both Jacquette and Slater's claims here, it will suffice to say that it seems Slater's point is plausible, notwithstanding Jacquette's response.

Thirdly, I do not quite understand why Jacquette insists Kant's principle must be postulated as a method of resolving moral dilemmas. It seems Jacquette wants to posit some moral dilemma then suggest Kant's principle generates some moral obligation for that dilemma. However, taken as a simple axiom, 'ought implies can' does not entail any moral obligation. It is distinct from the claim that 'can implies ought'. The maxim simply entails that you can only have some normative obligation if you have the capacity to fulfil that obligation. In regards to the Buridan ass-type scenario, I do not understand Jacquette's insistence that we construe the maxim as some means of resolving the moral dilemma, a method of determining which obligation ought to be fulfilled. In the broadest sense, all 'ought implies can' is that to have an obligation at all requires the capacity to act. As such, Kant's principle does not provide us with an instruction on which, if any, obligation to choose to fulfil. It merely specifies a condition that must be satisfied for such obligations to exist at all. It is difficult, then, to understand how the principle can be attacked for yielding counter-intuitive solutions to dilemmas when it prescribes no solutions whatsoever. For present purpose, I will continue on the assumption that Kant's principle is, for all intents and purposes, sound.

With that in mind, we can note that Aquinas raises this 'ought implies can' principle in the *Summa* to justify free will. He writes: "Man has free-will: otherwise, counsels, exhortations,

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<sup>130</sup> B. Harley Slater, 'Getting Kant Right', *Synthese* 99 (1994), 305-06. Jacquette has responded to Slater, albeit somewhat polemically in 'obligations'.

commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain.”<sup>131</sup> Like Kant, Aquinas highlights that free will is required for moral action and responsibility. There has to be freedom to do otherwise in order to have moral responsibility. An agent who is causally determined to do some act cannot be held morally accountable for it. Kant’s principle entails some version of the principle of alternative possibilities., such as I have defended.<sup>132</sup> A man whose car brakes fail causing him to kill some pedestrians is not morally liable for the deaths of said pedestrians because he could not do otherwise. In a nutshell, Aquinas rightly diagnoses that if you dispense with free will, you dispense with moral action and responsibility. As such, a major motivation for defending a libertarian conception of free will is to preserve moral responsibility and moral agency.

As noted, we are maintaining that freedom, properly construed, is the freedom to do otherwise (the PAP). This raises a number of problems, some of which have been formulated by Harry G. Frankfurt. In his important 1969 article ‘Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility’, Frankfurt argues that the PAP is false:

A dominant role in nearly all recent inquiries into the free-will problem has been played by a principle which I shall call "the principle of alternate possibilities." This principle states that a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise [...] But the principle of alternate possibilities is false. A person may well be morally responsible for what he has done even though he could not have done otherwise.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> ST I, Q. 83, A.1. (*Ad secundum dicendum quod septima die Deus aliquid operatus est, non novam creaturam condendo, sed creaturam administrando, et ad propriam operationem eam movendo: quod iam aliquantulum pertinet ad inchoationem quandam secundae perfectionis*).

<sup>132</sup> Dana Nelkin, *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility* (New York, 2011), 99.

<sup>133</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, ‘Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility’, *The Journal of Philosophy* 66:23 (1969), 831.

It seems that Frankfurt's paper has not, so far, shaken moral philosophers' conviction in the PAP by and large so far, but his argument is worth considering. He raises the possibility of coercion with the following example:

Jones decides for reasons of his own to do something, then someone threatens him with a very harsh penalty (so harsh that any reasonable person would submit to the threat) unless he does precisely that, and Jones does it. Will we hold Jones morally responsible for what he has done?<sup>134</sup>

Frankfurt then surveys four (including an amended case) explanations for Jones' behaviour, offering up the following explanation Jones as a counterexample to the PAP:

Suppose someone -Black, let us say - wants Jones<sup>4</sup> to perform a certain action. Black is prepared to go to considerable lengths to get his way, but he prefers to avoid showing his hand unnecessarily. So he waits until Jones<sup>4</sup> is about to make up his mind what to do, and he does nothing unless it is clear to him (Black is an excellent judge of such things) that Jones<sup>4</sup> is going to decide to do something other than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that Jones<sup>4</sup> is going to decide to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that Jones<sup>4</sup> decides to do, and that he does do, what he wants him to do. Whatever Jones<sup>4</sup>'s initial preferences and inclinations, then, Black will have his way.

For Frankfurt, Jones is a counter-example to the PAP and moral responsibility. While he tinkers with the example, he eventually concludes:

What action he performs is not up to him. Of course it is in a way up to him whether he acts on his own or as a result of Black's intervention. That depends upon what action he himself is inclined to perform. But whether he finally acts on his own or as a result

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 835.

of Black's intervention, he performs the same action. He has no alternative but to do what Black wants him to do. If he does it on his own, however, his moral responsibility for doing it is not affected by the fact that Black was lurking in the background with sinister intent, since this intent never comes into play.<sup>135</sup>

In other words, Jones had no other possibility, the PAP does not hold, but he is still morally responsible for his conduct in any circumstance under which he is acting on his own. Ergo, we appear to have a case where moral responsibility does not require the PAP. In response to this argument, Richard G. Corrigan has noted that it is difficult to identify the substantive role that Black's intervention plays in the example in that it makes no moral difference in relation to Jones' action because Jones retains some control, some agency to do otherwise, even in the Black scenario.<sup>136</sup> As such, he defends what Eleonore Stump – who shares Frankfurt's view – calls a “flicker of freedom” response.<sup>137</sup> I think there is merit to Corrigan's response. Frankfurt's position seems to conflate two distinct issues. If Jones is acting of his own volition, then he is a free agent and fully responsible. He, in the capacity, can choose between possibilities (call then X and Y). If Black wants Jones to choose X, and then Jones undertakes to choose Y, and Black acts upon such Jones in such a way that he must choose X instead (e.g., by hypnosis), then at that point, Jones is not morally responsible. Adding temporal locators can illustrate this. Consider the following example.

Suppose at  $t'$ , Jones decides to help an elderly lady cross the road. However, Black wants him to push her over into the road. Black will have to act at such a way at  $t''$  to alter Jones' course and achieve his desired outcome. So clearly at  $t'$ , Jones can deviate from Black's desire. He has possibilities. At  $t''$ , obviously Jones is compelled but that is of little consequence. It just entails

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 836.

<sup>136</sup> Richard H. Corrigan, *Divine Foreknowledge and Moral Responsibility* (London, 2007), 59ff.

<sup>137</sup> Eleonore Stump, 'Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility: The Flicker of Freedom', *The Journal of Ethics* 3:4 (1999), 299-324.

that at one time Jones has possibilities and has responsibilities, and at a later time, he does not. Whether Jones' action always lines up with what Black desires seems to be irrelevant; what is salient is that Jones does have alternative possibilities at the moment of time at which he acts. If Black acts to compel Jones at any point, then Jones ceases to have free agency at that point. As such, I fail to feel the force of Frankfurt's argument. It might be true that Black guarantees a particular outcome – that is a concession of no significance – but Frankfurt does not seem to take proper account of the fact that prior to the moment of coercion, Jones is free and has alternative possibilities; and posterior to the moment of coercion, Jones is not and does not. As such, Frankfurt's case does not provide a defeater to the PAP in relation to moral responsibility and action. Frankfurt might regard the distinction presented here as trivial because the outcome is not changeable, which is construable as entailing there are (in actuality) no alternative courses of action available to Jones, but perhaps an example can allay some of that objection.

Suppose some malevolent deity wants Jones to walk left at a crossroads. If he tries to walk right, the road in front of him will dissipate and he will have to walk left anyway. At the point he is at the fork in road, he is, in fact, presented with two possibilities and has agency to act upon that. He is responsible for whichever road he chooses. If he tries to go right and the road dissipates, it does not follow from that that he is responsible for going left (assuming he cannot turn back). Nor does it follow he lacked the agency to make the choice, which bears responsibility, in the first place.

All considered, it seems that PAP in relation to moral responsibility, and therefore freedom, stands. Assuming Kant's principle, which we have defended above, moral agency cannot exist without free will. I take it that this view is the common-sense view and its denial is unusual.<sup>138</sup> As Robert Young observes, "it is widely [...] thought that being able to do otherwise is necessary for

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<sup>138</sup> Robert Kane notes the following: "The usual positions on free will [...] assume that free and moral responsibility stand or fall together." See: Robert Kane, 'Free Will and Moral Responsibility: A Review of Bruce N. Waller's *Freedom Without Responsibility*', *Behaviour and Philosophy* 20:1 (1992), 77.



moral responsibility.”<sup>139</sup> As such, our motivation for accepting a strong account of free will – and a libertarian account of freedom – is to preserve moral agency. Faced with the option of denying moral agency – with all the obligations, duties, etc, that that entails – we ought to affirm the existence of a libertarian account of free will, defined by the ability to do otherwise.

To conclude this chapter, we can recap as follows: when we speak of creaturely freedom, we speak of a libertarian capacity to do otherwise. God enjoys a similar type of freedom. However, God’s ability to do otherwise is necessarily curtailed by His essence in a way that human freedom is not (since humans can act contrary to their nature in the way that a perfect God cannot). The existence of this sort of freedom – and thus the importance of preserving it from the fatalist objection – is demonstrated by its phenomenological and moral significance. To deny this sort of freedom and concede it to the fatalist would be a bitter pill to swallow. This would be particularly bitter from a theological perspective since so much theology hinges on it, as we shall see in the final chapter.

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Young, ‘The Implications of Determinism’, in: Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics* (Oxford, 1993), 535. I do not mean to appeal to authority here but there is some utility, given the brevity of the coverage of the problem here, to appeal to endoxic method.

In his *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time*, Adrian Bardon bluntly states: “Theological fatalism is – or should be – of concern to believers in an omniscient deity.”<sup>141</sup> While this might not seem like a particularly striking observation, we should note that in acknowledging the importance of engaging with the problem of theological fatalism, Bardon is giving voice to a philosophical problem that has challenged some of the most accomplished philosophers and theologians for over the past two millennia. While Bardon gives voice to the problem, this chapter gives voice to the solutions. In this chapter, I will survey some key figures across history who have worked on the question of divine foreknowledge. I intend to take a key thinker from each major time period: William of Ockham for the later medieval period, Descartes for the early modern period, and Richard Swinburne for the modern period. In terms of *why* these individuals have been selected, let me proffer two reasons: First, they represent different traditions to varying degrees. For example, Descartes largely repudiated Aristotle and Ockham’s scholasticism, albeit with some level of political diplomacy.<sup>142</sup> In examining diverse philosophical traditions, we gain a penetrating inside into a greater range of perspectives on this crucial conundrum. Second, they are majorly influential philosophers. Histories of philosophy tend to focus on key figures and since this chapter is a sort of history of philosophy, it will follow in that vein. While less significant thinkers have made more substantive contributions in this area (e.g., Descartes’ position of theological fatalism is under-developed), studying major thinkers with a system-building methodology provides some insight about how one can approach the problem of fatalism within different conceptual paradigms.

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<sup>140</sup> My grateful thanks to Luke Elson for his constructive feedback on the draft paper on which this chapter is based.

<sup>141</sup> Adrian Bardon, *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time* (New York, 2013), 148.

<sup>142</sup> On this, see: Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Ithaca, 1999), 97ff.

In addition to expositing their proposed solution to the problem, the deficits of these respective views will be tentatively explored. The purpose of this project is to highlight why these views ought to be rejected as solutions, though they provide useful insights in developing a Thomist-cum-Molinist solution to the problem.

### *William of Ockham*

William of Ockham's response to the problem of foreknowledge, which had been given new life in the work of Marilyn Adams and (in a more qualified sense) Alvin Plantinga,<sup>143</sup> had – according to Zagzebski – become the one of the most discussed solutions to the problem in the 1990s.<sup>144</sup> If we recall the principle of the necessity of the past in the formulation of theological fatalism according to which past events are absolutely and unalterably exempt from the causal sequence, Ockham denies that principle firmly. In doing so, he aims to neuter the fatalist argument by making the boundary between past and future more permeable.

Ockham's response relies on the assumption that facts are like boiled eggs: they can be 'hard' or 'soft'. The idea here is that a hard fact about the past is in some sense fixed. There is a necessity of the past in relation these facts. By contrast, soft facts are not so fixed. John Martin Fischer explains the distinction:

One kind of past fact is genuinely and solely about the past; we might call this kind of fact a 'hard' fact about the past. Another kind of fact is not both genuinely and solely about the past; such a fact is a 'soft' fact about the past. The key claim of Ockham is that soft facts about the past do not carry the necessity that attends hard facts about the past.

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<sup>143</sup> Marilyn Adams, 'Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?', *Philosophical Review* 76:4 (1967), 492–503; and Alvin Plantinga, 'On Ockham's Way Out', *Faith and Philosophy*, 3:3 (1986), 235–269.

<sup>144</sup> Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York, 1991), 66–67.

Further, Ockham's view is that certain facts about God are soft facts and thus that they are not necessary in virtue of being about the past.<sup>145</sup>

This distinction is not designed be a perfect account of how God foreknows without compromising free will – Ockham candidly admits that “it is impossible to express clearly the way in which God knows future contingents”<sup>146</sup> – but it is a framework by which Ockham tries to break down the fatalist position. What this distinction entails is that some facts about the past are really, in part, about the future. For example, consider the following claim: ‘It was true in 1921 that Prince Philip would die in 2021’. This ‘soft’ fact about the past is really, in part, a claim about the future. What Ockham argued was that while hard facts about the past could not be changed, free agents have the capacity to affect a soft fact about the past. So, while the necessity of the past (‘If P is about the past, then p is necessary’) holds for hard facts as they are accidentally necessary, soft facts elude such necessity and the fatalist argument breaks down. By ‘accidentally necessary’, what is meant is they gain their necessity by virtue of the temporal sequence. For Ockham, truth values of propositions are determinate, but the modal status is not. For example, ‘The Queen will die in 2022’ is, has always been, and will be true, but not necessarily. Prior to her demise, it was more accidentally contingent. It only acquired necessity when the event elapsed. As such, the fatalist is challenged by Ockham to prove that all facts are hard facts – and that is a burden that is difficult to bear.

Let us illustrate all of this with an example: ‘God knew from eternity that Peter will deny Christ’. While God’s knowledge cannot change, God knows of Peter’s denial contingently, according to Ockham. As a soft fact, it eludes the necessity of the past, which is why it is known only contingently yet infallibly. How does it escape the necessity of the past? Ockham explains:

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<sup>145</sup> John Martin Fischer, ‘Soft Facts and Harsh Realities: Reply to William Craig’, *Religious Studies* 27:4 (1991), 523; cf. Ockham, *Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann (Indianapolis, 1983), 46–7.

<sup>146</sup> Ockham, *Predestination*, 50.

I maintain that [‘God does have necessary knowledge regarding future contingents’] can be understood in two ways. [Understood] in the first way [it means] that God’s knowledge whereby future contingents are known are necessary. And this is true, since the divine essence itself is one single necessary and immutable cognition of all things, complexes as well as non-complexes, necessary and contingent. [Understood] in the second way [it means] that by that knowledge future contingents are known necessarily. And in that way [His knowledge] is not necessary, nor need it be granted that God has necessary knowledge regarding future contingents; instead, [His knowledge regarding them] is contingent. For just as this or that future contingent contingently will be, so God knows that it contingently will be, for if He knows it, He can *not* know that it will be.<sup>147</sup>

Ockham’s point, as I read him, is that the contingency of claims like ‘It was true in 1921 that Prince Philip would die in 2021’ precludes fatalism, for such soft facts deny the necessity upon which the fatalist dilemma is predicated. If past facts about God’s beliefs are not necessary, then they cease to be determinative.

The problem with Ockham’s view is that this distinction between hard and soft facts is problematic. Trenton Merrick’s complaint that the distinction is dubious is not without merit. Alvin Plantinga concedes that “[i]t may be difficult or even impossible to give a useful criterion for the distinction between hard and soft facts about the past, but we do have some grasp of it.”<sup>148</sup> Adams’ formulation was erudite but was definitively refuted by Fischer, though others have tried to rehabilitate it.<sup>149</sup> What Fischer demonstrates powerfully in that regard is Adam’s criterion functionally and logically precludes the possibility of any hard facts. The trouble is, as

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>148</sup> Plantinga, ‘On Ockham’, 247.

<sup>149</sup> John Fischer, ‘Freedom and Foreknowledge’, *The Philosophical Review* 92:1 (1983), 67-79; cf. Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, ‘Hard and Soft Facts’, *The Philosophical Review* 93:3 (1984), 419-34, especially 419-21.

David Hunt and Linda Zagzebski have noted, “[t]he resulting formulations became so refined and elaborate, in an effort to avoid possible counterexamples, that they risked becoming detached from the simple intuition they were intended to capture.”<sup>150</sup> Zagzebski in particular almost mocks Jonathan Kvanvig’s elaborate definition on the grounds that, fully stated, it would be more than a page long.<sup>151</sup> The beauty of Ockham’s conception of soft facts is their intuitive value but once that intuition is lost, the distinction loses any appeal. It, therefore, becomes less preferable than competing theories. Of course, this is not a knock down refutation of the Ockhamist position. The argument here is not that because scholars have effectively dismantled every prominent Ockhamist formulation, Ockham’s approach is demonstrably wrong. It is possible an Ockhamist will one day formulate the position coherently and concisely. However, as a principle of rationality, being *ad hoc* constitutes a reason to reject a theory.<sup>152</sup> As such, the *ad hoc*-ness of present explanations means that the Ockhamist solution ought to be tentatively rejected.

### *Descartes*

Penultimately, we turn to Descartes. Descartes’ answer to the problem is of particular interest since God is at the heart of the entire Cartesian *weltanschauung*. Indeed, for Descartes, God is the guarantor of our knowledge, so it is of importance that God Himself has knowledge.<sup>153</sup>

In *Les Passions de l’âme*, a work written to address Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia’s queries about the soul’s action, Descartes affirms a strong conception of providence:

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<sup>150</sup> Hunt and Zagzebski, ‘Foreknowledge’.

<sup>151</sup> Zagzebski, *Dilemma*, 74; cf. Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York, 1986), *passim*. A similar critique is proffered by Joshua Hoffman, ‘Review: The Possibility of an All-Knowing God’, *Faith and Philosophy* 6:2 (1989), 230-33.

<sup>152</sup> In his valuable paper on *ad hoc* hypotheses in science, Maarten Boudry demonstrates why *ad hoc*-ness is “an important epistemological sin.” (12) See: Maarten Boudry, ‘The Hypothesis that Saves the Day: Ad Hoc Reasoning in Pseudoscience’, *Logique & Analyse* 223 (2013), 1-12.

<sup>153</sup> Bernard Williams, quoted in: Bryan Magee, *The Great Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (Oxford, 1987), 91.

[W]e should reflect upon the fact that nothing can possibly happen other than as Providence has determined from all eternity. Providence is, so to speak, a fate or immutable necessity, which we must set against Fortune in order to expose the latter as a chimera which arises solely from an error of our intellect.<sup>154</sup>

By ‘fortune’, it is my interpretation that what Descartes has in mind is something akin to luck.<sup>155</sup>

The contrast drawn here between fortune and providence is a contrast of necessities.

Providence entails some sort of necessity, whereas luck does not. Descartes’ phrase *une fatalité ou une nécessité immuable* signals a clear commitment to divine determinism.<sup>156</sup> However, Descartes then proceeds to complicate his ostensible fatalism:

[S]uppose we have business in some place to which we might travel by two different routes, one usually much safer than the other. And suppose Providence decrees that if we go by the route we regard as safer we shall not avoid being robbed, whereas we may travel by the other route without any danger. Nevertheless, we should not be indifferent as to which one we choose or rely upon the immutable fatality of this decree. Reason insists that we choose the route which is usually the safer, and our desire in this case must be fulfilled when we have followed this route, whatever evil may befall us; for, since any such evil was inevitable from our point of view, we had no reason to wish to be exempt from it: we had reason only to do the best that our intellect was able to recognize, as I am supposing that we did.<sup>157</sup>

This example suggests that the *nécessité immuable* does not preclude choice. Indeed, the statement *à choisir l’un ou l’autre* seems to presuppose genuine agency over the decision; it is a

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<sup>154</sup> René Descartes, ‘Passions of the Soul’, in: John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (eds.) *The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*, Volume 1 (New York, 1985), 380.

<sup>155</sup> In his 2017 translation’s glossary (<https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1649part2.pdf>), Jonathan Bennett helpfully defines the term in this way.

<sup>156</sup> I am thankful to Luke Elson for noting that Descartes does not explicitly use the term ‘God’ in the quoted excerpt. Descartes’ work treats providence of something belonging to God. It is God’s action.

<sup>157</sup> Descartes, ‘Passions’, 380-81.

statement of alternative possibilities. Descartes' ostensible fatalism appears to be more compatibilistic at the very least.

One reading of what Descartes is alluding to here is offered by continental philosopher Frank Ruda in his 'René the Fatalist', Ruda notes that Descartes adds a caveat to his apparent fatalism, with the rationalist opting to exempt "matters it has been determined to be dependent on our free will."<sup>158</sup> Ruda's reading of this is that Descartes' view amounts to the idea that "we learn what depends on us by affirming that that which depends on us was determined to depend on us by something that does not depend on us, namely God's providence."<sup>159</sup> According to Ruda's Descartes, God's providence implies the necessity of contingency. Ruda explains:

What happens to me due to divine providence is ultimately necessarily contingent (as I am not God) and contingently necessary (as God decided what happens to me due to reasons inaccessible and hence meaningless to me). In short, it is important to emphasize both the necessity of contingency as well as the contingency of necessity.<sup>160</sup>

At first glance, this claim is opaque and runs epistemology and modality too close together. It seems as though Ruda is arguing that the necessarily contingent happenings are contingent by virtue of the fact that we do not know when providence intervenes. Providence, he writes, "necessarily strikes us as being contingent."<sup>161</sup> Clearly, though, the mere fact that something appears as contingent does not make it contingent. The modal status of event is not determined by our epistemic limitations. It would thus be unhelpful to characterise such happenings as necessarily contingent. I do not think that it Ruda's meaning, though. Descartes does concern himself with the apparent contingency within divine necessity, but he does not see the contingency of something as inferable by virtue that "its occurrence necessarily strikes us as

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<sup>158</sup> Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism* (Lincoln, 2016), 58.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.



being contingent.”<sup>162</sup> Rather, Descartes argues that God imbues the world with contingency. He writes: “We must recognize that everything is guided by divine Providence, whose eternal decree is infallible and immutable to such an extent that, except for matters it has determined to be dependent on our free will.”<sup>163</sup> I think, on a correct reading of Ruda, this remark by Descartes makes sense. Ruda identifies that for Descartes, there is absolute and contingent necessity. As such, it is worth exploring these notions in a little more depth by delving into Saniye Vatansever’s analysis of these terms.<sup>164</sup> On this analysis, necessity is more akin to immutability. As such, absolute necessity refers to those truths which are immutable and unchangeable, whereas conditional necessity refers to truths that are unchangeable so long as God’s will is unchangeable.<sup>165</sup> With this in mind, Ruda’s interpretation of Descartes’ view as what happens to me due to divine providence is ultimately necessarily contingent and contingently necessary becomes not merely a matter of epistemic awareness but modal significance. Things strike us as contingent not just because we do not understand Providence (for example, if a tree falls, it appears to be contingent, although it is part of God’s necessary plan), but because it was unchangeable as God ordered things in such a way from eternity. God designed the system that way. It is difficult to follow Ruda’s analysis, largely because Descartes’ himself is hard to follow, and it is tempting to interpret Ruda’s reading of Descartes as rooting the contingency of the world, of free will, in the privation of some knowledge. If so, that is unhelpful. Properly construed, Ruda’s talk of contingently necessary is an allusion to *necessitas per accidens* in that what happens to me is contingent in that it did not need to happen to me, but it is necessary in that God determined it. Indeed, Ruda makes this clearer when he writes that “[m]y thoughts are mine— especially when they are free— only because God has

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Descartes, ‘Passions’, 380.

<sup>164</sup> Saniye Vatansever, ‘Dois Tipos de Necessidade em Descartes: Condicionais e Absolutos’, *Filosofia Unisinos* 18:2 (2017), 98-106.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

determined them to be what they are.”<sup>166</sup> This seems more akin to the correct reading of Descartes wherein God introduces contingency within the scope of providential planning. In short, Ruda’s view seems to be that the providence of God leaves actions undetermined because it is not true that if God determines X, necessarily X will occur. Rather, given God’s necessity – as noted above – determines contingency. If God determines X, contingently X will inevitably occur. Ruda seems to understand the crux of the Cartesian position, but his exposition is convoluted by the emphasis on mystery and epistemology.

Granting that Descartes is approaching the question of free will from the angle that it exists as a contingency that God has ordained by His providence, we end up with a rather strange view. Ruda argues that, for Descartes, “in God necessity and contingency become undecidable and indistinguishable, as whatever he contingently wills becomes necessary due to fully contingent reasons.”<sup>167</sup> Ruda seems to think this has something to do with Descartes’ view that God can do the logically impossible. The idea that God’s necessity and contingency is indistinguishable relates to it being beyond clear and distinct representation and, therefore, ultimately we just have to conclude that we are forced to be free. Ruda explains:

For Descartes, I have to assume that I am determined (I am forced to be free or to think by something that does not spring from my thought or freedom), and this implies that in the heart of the human being, at the origin of true human actions, lies something determining the human in a manner that cannot leave us indifferent. Through fatalism one affirms the impossible possibility that true freedom is possible, although there is no objective guarantee (neither in me nor in the world) for it. Simply put, only a fatalist can be free.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom*, 62.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

If we, following Ruda, read Descartes as relying on the premise that God is not bound by logical constraints, then Descartes' view is patently wrong. While thinkers like John Sanders have attempted to rehabilitate that view by distinguishing between 'logical impossibility' and 'logical thought',<sup>169</sup> there are simply no grounds for accepting logical impossibility. Is that to say that Descartes' view is without merit? Not necessarily. The idea of being determined to be free has merit, which leads to C. P. Ragland's interpretation of Descartes. According to Ragland, Descartes is a sort of Molinist. Ragland notes that Descartes' shares the traditional Boethian conception of God whereby God's providence extends over all eternity.<sup>170</sup> This, Descartes himself notes, elicits the fatalist challenge, noting that it is hard to reconcile "divine preordination with the freedom of our will, or attempt to grasp both these things at once."<sup>171</sup> However, like Aquinas and Molina, Descartes adopts the idea that God's determines that agents will be free. As above with Ruda: The providence of God leaves actions undetermined because it is not true that if God determines X, necessarily X will occur. Rather, given God's necessity – as noted above – determines contingency. If God determines X, contingently X will occur. The mechanism for this in Descartes' mind, Ragland argues, is a synthesis of the views of the Jesuit Molinists and the Dominicans. While Ruda focussed on Descartes' emphasis on the mystery of God's causal relations, and rightly so,<sup>172</sup> what he overlooks is Descartes' Molinist tendencies. Following Étienne Gilson,<sup>173</sup> Ragland finds the doctrine of middle knowledge in the following passage:

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<sup>169</sup> John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, 2007), 35.

<sup>170</sup> C. P. Ragland, *The Will to Reason: Theodicy and Freedom in Descartes* (New York, 2016), 192-93.

<sup>171</sup> *AT*8/20. All references to *AT* are from: René Descartes, *Ouvres de Descartes*, eds. C. Adam and P. Tannery (Reprint; Paris, 1964-1975).

<sup>172</sup> Descartes writes: "But we shall get out of these difficulties if we remember that our mind is finite, while the power of God is infinite [...] We may attain sufficient knowledge of this power to perceive clearly and distinctly that God possesses it; but we cannot get a sufficient grasp of it to see how it *leaves the free actions of men undetermined*." *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Étienne Gilson, *La Liberté chez Descartes et la Théologie* (Paris, 1913), 390-91.

I pass to the difficulty your Highness proposes concerning free choice, the dependence and liberty of which I shall try to explain by a comparison. If a king who has prohibited duels, and who knows very assuredly that two gentlemen of his kingdom, who live in different towns, are in a quarrel and are so angry with one another that nothing could prevent them from fighting if they meet; if, I say, this king commissions one of them to go on a certain day to the town of the other, and also commissions this other to go on the same day to the place of the first, he knows very assuredly that they will not fail to meet and to fight, and thus to contravene his ban on duelling, but for all that he does not constrain them to do so; and his knowledge, and even the will he had to determine them in this way, does not prevent them from fighting, when they meet, as voluntarily and freely as they would have done if had he known nothing of it and it was by some other circumstance that they encountered each other, and they can just as justly be punished, because they have contravened his ban. Now what a king can do in that case with respect to certain free actions of his subjects, God, who has an infinite prescience and an infinite power, infallibly does with respect to all those of men. And before he had sent us into this world, he knew exactly what would be all the inclinations of our will; it is he himself who has put them in us; it is he also who has disposed all the other things which are outside us in order to bring it about that such and such objects would present themselves to our senses at such and such times, on the occasion of which—he knew—our free will would determine us to such or such thing; and he has thus willed it, but for all that he has not willed to constrain us to it. And as one can distinguish in this king two different degrees of will, the one by which he willed that these gentlemen would fight each other (since he brought it about that they would meet) and the other by which he has not willed it (since he prohibited duels), in the same way theologians distinguish in God an absolute and independent will (by which he wills that everything

should happen just as it does) and another which is relative, and which relates to the merit or demerit of men, by which he wills that one obey his laws.<sup>174</sup>

Ragland sees this one text as sufficient to establish a middle knowledge view, according to which God pre-volitionally surveys all possible worlds logically prior to the creative decree. I am inclined to agree it is ostensibly a middle knowledge view, though it is far too isolated to warrant the claim that Descartes was a Molinist (and, in fairness, Ragland is not affirming that Descartes is a pure Molinist). Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile with the passages in Descartes that imply some determinism. The best we can make of it is that Descartes' view was less than precisely defined in his own mind. In that sense, Descartes – on my reading – is not quite a Molinist, but rather the middle knowledge view was one aspect of a body of thoughts around the topic that Descartes was trying to work out. It is for that reason, I suggest, that Descartes often falls back on the logical impossibility claim. Granting that Descartes did subscribe to some idea of middle knowledge, that aspect of his thinking is sound. However, Descartes' view is embryonic and ill-developed. Moreover, the Molinist could never accept Descartes' claim that God exceeds the bounds of logic, for the Molinist model is specifically developed to accommodate the logical problems that arise. For example, the logical ordering of God's knowledge is of utmost importance on the Molinist view, but Descartes' view seems to imply such ordering is unnecessary. If so, Descartes' view collapses the Molinist view by undermining the pre-volitional positioning of middle knowledge. If the logical ordering is unnecessary, the distinction between pre-volitional and post-volitional knowledge becomes redundant.

*Swinburne*

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<sup>174</sup> AT/4/352–354, as quoted at: Ragland, *The Will to Reason*, 213–14 (Ragland's own translation).

Finally, we turn to Richard Granville Swinburne. In his *The Coherence of Theism*, Swinburne caused a philosophical stir by defining God's omniscience in terms of God's predictive power. As one theologian remarked at a theology conference: "Swinburne's God is every bookie's worst nightmare: He backs the winner virtually every time, but you can't accuse Him of rigging the race because He's just making informed predictions, just like any other punter."<sup>175</sup> This characterisation is perhaps a little uncharitable but it speaks to the essence of Swinburne's view. On Swinburne's view, God is like the Super-Intelligent Being in the Newcomb Paradox which accurately predicts all future events.<sup>176</sup> Swinburne writes:

If our universe is created by God and the human beings in it have free will, then the limitation that God cannot know incorrigibly how those humans will act will be a further limitation of his own choice to create human beings with free will. Choosing to give others freedom he limits his own knowledge of what they will do. As regards humans, even given that they have free will, they are clearly creatures of limited knowledge in the actions and the reasons for doing them which occur to them, of habit in how they execute their actions, and of desire (i.e., inbuilt inclinations) in which actions they do – except in so far as they see reason for acting contrary to desire. Their free will is subject to these limitations and that makes it easy for us to predict most human actions and for God to predict *almost* all.<sup>177</sup>

Swinburne's crucial caveat that 'almost' all actions are predictable by God is specifically designed to allow God a margin of error. This raises the first problem for Swinburne's view:

How can God predict some actions but not others? For humans, this is easily explainable:

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<sup>175</sup> Personal anecdote.

<sup>176</sup> This paradox was originally presented as a philosophical problem in: Robert Nozick, 'Newcomb's Problem and Two Principles of Choice', in: Nicholas Rescher et al (eds.), *Essays in Honour of Carl G. Hempel: A Tribute on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Dordrecht, 1969), 114-46.

<sup>177</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Revised edition; Oxford, 1993), 181; cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford, 1986), 259ff.

prediction failures result from assumption failures. For example, suppose I assume that every morning, John will buy milk. That assumption can be well-justified. It could be the case that I know that, as a matter of habit, John buys a fresh pint of milk every morning from the supermarket. From that, I can predict that tomorrow John will be at the supermarket to purchase his semi-skimmed. If it transpires that John does not buy milk at the supermarket tomorrow, the failure of my prediction is due to the erroneous assumption that John buys milk every morning. That assumption, it turns out, is false. There is a straightforward explanation about why my predictions fail. It is less straightforward in relation to God because it is not clear what assumptions God can get wrong given Swinburne affirms God's infallibility in relation to present-tense facts. How can God correctly use prior facts to predict, say, the outcome of the Premier League, and yet fail correctly predict, say, the outcome of a presidential election based on prior facts? The natural response that Swinburne could take is to say that human agency is inherently unpredictable. Take the Premier League example. God can know the fitness and form of the players, the softness of the pitch, the endorphins released by the chants of the crowds, etc, and make a pretty reliable prediction, but ultimately human action can defy that. Perhaps this is so, but there remains an intuitive sense that if all the inputs are known, the output cannot be a matter of prediction. If God knows, for instance, what every citizen's voting intention is, and whether they are minded to vote, whether they have means to vote, etc, He must surely have foreknowledge of the election result – and yet foreknowledge is what Swinburne denies. I do not take this to be a defeater of Swinburne's view but it speaks to the difficulty of the position he endorses.

How does Swinburne come to his view? When confronted with the fatalist dilemma, Swinburne not only bites the bullet; he swallows the whole armoury. His objection takes two forms: (i) that divine omniscience is incompatible with human freedom; and (ii) that divine

omniscience is incompatible with God's own free will. For Swinburne, (i) provides *prima facie* support for (ii).

Turning to (i), Swinburne argues that Aquinas misunderstands the crux of the fatalist dilemma. For Aquinas, the solution to the dilemma to delineate between two propositions (recall our distinction earlier between *necessitas consequentis* and *consequentiae*):

A: Necessarily, if God foreknows P, P will come to pass.

B: If God foreknows P, necessarily P will come to pass.

As we will see in a later chapter, Aquinas' solution to the problem relies on an affirmation that (A) is true but that (B) is not. If (B) is true, human free will is erased, but Aquinas – and his followers – have denied that the theist should accept (B). Swinburne finds this unimpressive. (A), he argues, is “hardly an interesting theological truth.”<sup>178</sup> He goes on to develop the following argument:<sup>179</sup>

(1) If P knows *X*, then three things must be true: (i) *X* is true; (ii) P believes *X*; and (iii) P is justified in believing that *X* is true (the traditional tripartite account of knowledge).<sup>180</sup>

(2) If P is omniscient, P must know all true propositions.

(3) P must believe all true propositions.

(4) P has beliefs about everything describable by a true proposition.

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<sup>178</sup> Swinburne, *Coherence of Theism*, 174.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-83. I have adapted the terminology somewhat.

<sup>180</sup> It is worth noting that this premise can be undermined via reference to Gettier cases (see: Edmund Gettier, ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’, *Analysis* 23:6 (1963), 121-23). I do not take this approach here because with Gettier's paper is technically correct, the traditional definition is functionally acceptable for present purposes. As far as I am aware, epistemologists have reached no consensus on an exhaustive definition of what constitutes knowledge and there is no scope to open that debate here. As Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa and Matthias Steup note: “The attempt to analyze knowledge has received a considerable amount of attention from epistemologists, particularly in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but no analysis has been widely accepted. Some contemporary epistemologists reject the assumption that knowledge is susceptible to analysis.” (‘Analysis of Knowledge’, *SEP*, 2017, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/>>, (accessed: 23/10/2022)).



(5) If some agent S acts freely, S's action at  $t_1$  will not be necessitated by some earlier state (e.g.,  $t_0$ ).

(6) If at  $t_0$ , P believes something about what S will do at  $t_1$ , then (if S is acting freely) S can render that belief true or false at  $t_1$ .

(7) At  $t_1$ , S cannot make P's beliefs at  $t_0$  true or false (since this would involve changing the past by bringing about a past state)

(8) Therefore, S cannot know X where X is some proposition about the future if S can act freely.<sup>181</sup>

Since God cannot hold true, justified beliefs about the future without compromising human freedom, Swinburne argues, the fatalist dilemma succeeds. To deny the fatalist dilemma is to affirm backward causation – which Swinburne deems to be logically impossible because he takes causation to be metaphysically logically unidirectional.<sup>182</sup> Pushing this forward to (ii), Swinburne argues that if God's omniscience extended to knowing the future, He would compromise His own free agency. God could not hold justified, true beliefs about the future actions of free agents. If God were to have such beliefs, He would have to have the belief that the agent is, in fact, a free agent. He would have to be justified in believing the agent's future actions (the propositions that describe them, that is) are true. If He is justified in believing that such future action is true, He - *a fortiori* - must be justified in believing that His own beliefs about the agent's future actions and the future actions themselves are correlated.<sup>183</sup> This sets up a problem. Swinburne explains:

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<sup>181</sup> The reader will note the influence of Pike's formulation here. See: Nelson Pike, 'Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action,' *The Philosophical Review* 74:1 (1965) 27-46.

<sup>182</sup> Richard Swinburne, 'Causation, Time, and God's Omniscience', *Topoi* 36:4 (2017), 675-84.

<sup>183</sup> I take Swinburne to mean 'perfectly correlated' here.

[G]iven that nothing in the past in any way influences what A does (and P knows this), P could only be justified in supposing there was a correlation between his beliefs and A's actions if he were justified in supposing that A's actions made a difference to His beliefs; that his beliefs of them were caused (or largely influenced by) A's actions. But to make this supposition is to allow backward causation [which is impossible].<sup>184</sup>

For Swinburne, then, omniscience that involves foreknowledge presents irresolvable contradictions between divine knowledge and human freedom, and with the concept of God itself. His solution is to concede to the fatalist that God does not really know the future. This position – known as ‘open theism’ – has gained traction in recent years, especially due to its defence by Gregory A. Boyd and others<sup>185</sup> Boyd identifies the open theism view with the denial of the idea that all of reality is exhaustively settled. The future remains alethically open (either wholly or partially) and that is, for open theists, perfectly consistent with the concept of omniscience, properly construed<sup>186</sup>.

In exploring why Swinburne's open theist view ought to be rejected, I want to focus on its conception of omniscience, rather than addressing its acceptance of fatalism. Swinburne argues that his account of omniscience is the proper construal of what God's knowledge must involve. Both he and Boyd separately try to align their view with the traditional religious representations of God's knowledge. For example, Boyd's example of Peter coheres well with Swinburne's predictive account of God's beliefs about the future. Boyd writes of Peter's denial of Christ:

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<sup>184</sup> Swinburne, *Coherence of Theism*, 177,

<sup>185</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, ‘The Open Theism View’, in: James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (eds.), *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, 2001), 13-64.

<sup>186</sup> Whether Swinburne subscribes to alethic openness is disputed, see: Alan R. Rhoda, ‘Open Theism and Other Models of Divine Providence’, in: Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher (eds.), *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities* (Dordrecht, 2013), 294.

Future actions might also be settled not only because the Lord has decided them beforehand, but also because a person's character settles them. As we all know, character becomes more predictable over time and the longer we persist in a chosen path, the more that path becomes part of what we are. Hence, generally speaking, the range of viable options we are capable of diminishes over time. Our omniscient creator is able to predict our behaviour far more extensively than we could predict it ourselves [...]. [W]hen the Lord tells Peter he will deny him three times before morning [...] we don't need to suppose that the future is exhaustively settled in God's mind to explain this prediction. We only need to believe that God the Father knew and revealed to Jesus one solidified aspect of Peter's character that was predictable in the immediate future.<sup>187</sup>

The question, then, is whether substituting foreknowledge with predicative power is sufficient to maintain God's status as the greatest conceivable being and provide a robust account of omniscience. I think not. First, the theological idea that the God of the Torah, the Bible, and Qur'an lacks genuine foreknowledge relies on contrived readings of those texts (and frequently involves anthropopathisms). While not the object of this paper, anyone who wants to understand the God of scripture will err in accepting open theism. The second, and more important, point is that this account is inconsistent with Anselmian definition of God as the greatest conceivable being. As Luis Scott puts it: "Open theism gets God wrong."<sup>188</sup> Bruce Ware has explored this problem well in his *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*.<sup>189</sup> The idea that God does not know the future inherently makes Him less than perfect and entails all sorts of counter-intuitive claims about God. For example, it entails that God could be surprised. It also, I argue, entails that God is fallible because His predictions can, in

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<sup>187</sup> Boyd, 'Open Theism', 20

<sup>188</sup> Luis R. Scott, *Frustrating God: How Open Theism Gets God All Wrong* (Bloomington, 2013), title.

<sup>189</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, 2001), *passim*; cf. R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Room for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, 1996).

principle, turn out to be wrong. In other words, God can hold false beliefs. For example, if it transpired that Peter chose not to deny Christ, and in doing so provided God with an almighty surprise, then God's prior belief about Peter would be false. It is difficult to see how a fallible being can be the greatest conceivable being. Swinburne's claim that he believes "there is a God, understood in the way that Western religion (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) has generally understood that claim" is false.<sup>190</sup> Thus, Swinburne's open theism is no solution at all, for it merely avoids the theological fatalist attack on God by defining in such a way that is inconsistent with a proper understanding of God and scripture.<sup>191</sup> That is not to say Swinburne's sub-par deity does not exist, but rather he is simply no longer talking about God. Swinburne's God dies the death of a single qualification, to adapt the late Antony Flew's famous phrase.<sup>192</sup> Of course, the open theism might retort that a God that does not know the future is still the greatest conceivable being because the greatest conceivable being must be the greatest logically possible being and a God that knows the future is not logically possible. This point can be conceded formally but it does not negate that the deity we are left with does not resemble the God of classical theism. All Swinburne's stance would show is that classical Anselmian theism is wrong about God; it does not resolve the fatalist dilemma within that framework.

It is worth stating that an open future in the sense of actions being indeterminate in some sense is a great asset because that's necessary to preserve creaturely freedom (a wholly closed future would, obviously, curtail the ability to do otherwise (PAP)). As we shall see in our defence of a dynamic conception of time (Chapter 8), and in our synthesis of Molinism and Thomism(Chapter 10), openness in the temporal mode is highly desirable philosophically and theologically. However, it is desirable only if it does not compromise divine omniscience. The

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<sup>190</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?* (Oxford, 1996), 3.

<sup>191</sup> See: Lawrence W. Wood, 'Does God Know the Future? Can God be Mistaken? A Reply to Richard Swinburne', *The Asbury Theological Journal* 56:2 (2001), 5-47.

<sup>192</sup> Antony Flew, 'Theology and Falsification', in: Antony Flew and Basil Mitchell (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York, 1955), 107.

model that I develop allows that openness without the compromise by delineating between the eternal and temporal mode.

In this chapter, we have explored a number of perspectives from the history of philosophy on how to respond to the problem of theological fatalism. In showing the shortfalls of these respective views, I lay the foundation for the claim that, in comparison, the Thomistic and Molinist views are more plausible. While some scholars have opted to regard the problem of theological fatalism as irresolvable based on the fact that providing a satisfactory solution has been fraught with difficulties, a more optimistic view is that the deficiencies of these solutions provide insights from which the more plausible Thomistic and Molinist solutions can learn.

## Chapter 4: The Thomist Account of Providence

### I.

In the ‘Studies in Sanctity’ section of a 1932 article in *The Spectator*, G. K. Chesterton concurred with the view that “[t]he Reformation happened because people hadn’t the brains to understand Aquinas.”<sup>193</sup> While Chesterton was undoubtedly correct to praise the *Doctor Angelicus*’ impress intellect, in defence of the Reformers it ought to be said that Aquinas’ thinking is often enigmatic – not least in relation to divine foreknowledge. This chapter provides first an analysis of Aquinas’ general conception of divine knowledge, which leads into a more specific application to divine foreknowledge and how it pertains to causality. It also assesses some major debates around the defensibility of Aquinas’ view of the solution to theological fatalism.

### II. Aquinas on Divine Knowledge

Perhaps Aquinas’ most insightful discussion of divine knowledge is found in *Summa Theologiae* 1 Q14.<sup>194</sup> Aquinas begins by distinguishing between *divine knowledge (Scientia)* and the *divine will*. For present purposes, we need only recognise that Aquinas distinguishes between the two.

Aquinas begins his discourse on knowledge from the premise that “everything known is in the knower” and these things in the knower may be called “ideas”.<sup>195</sup> For God to know something, then, is for Him to possess the idea, or form, of it. In defence of this premise, Aquinas appeals

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<sup>193</sup> G. K. Chesterton, ‘Studies in Sanctity: VI. – St Thomas Aquinas’, *The Spectator*, 27/02/1932, 280-81. Quote on 281.

<sup>194</sup> All citations from *Summa Theologiae* are from: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Reprint; Notre Dame, 1981). I have provided the original Latin for longer quotations to provide context.

<sup>195</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, a. 6.

to an Aristotelian distinction between beings with cognition or intelligence and beings without it:

[W]e must note that intelligent beings are distinguished from non-intelligent beings in that the latter possess only their own form; whereas the intelligent being is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing, for the idea of the thing known is in the knower. Hence it is manifest that the nature of a non-intelligent being is more contracted and limited; whereas the nature of intelligent beings has a greater amplitude and extension.<sup>196</sup>

To understand this passage, it is perhaps helpful to analyse what Aquinas means by ‘cognition’ or ‘intelligence’. The prevailing understanding of Aquinas’ theory of cognition is that cognizant and non-cognizant things are distinguished by the capacity to possess others’ form. That is to say, in Aquinas’ mind, a cognizant thing – by which I mean the subject knower which has its own real being – in some sense possesses not only its own form (or idea), but the form of some other thing. As Robbie Moser has articulated it: “The form of the thing known has a mode of ‘being in the knower,’ a representational mode which is the distinguishing mark of the cognitive as such.”<sup>197</sup> To illustrate, I have a dog named Simba. When I think about Simba, what is in my mind? It is surely not Simba himself, for he consists of fur and flesh (substance). What, in fact, is in my mind is Simba’s form – the form of a dog. So as a cognizant agent with real being, I have my own form and also the form of Simba, at least when I am thinking about him. In my mind, Simba’s form has *esse intentionale*; in the flesh, it is what we might refer to as *esse* or the

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<sup>196</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A1; cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, III. Original Latin: *Respondeo dicendum quod in Deo perfectissime est scientia. Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod cognoscentia a non cognoscentibus in hoc distinguuntur, quia non cognoscentia nihil habent nisi formam suam tantum; sed cognoscens natum est habere formam etiam rei alterius, nam species cogniti est in cognoscente. Unde manifestum est quod natura rei non cognoscentis est magis coarctata et limitata, natura autem rerum cognoscentium habet maiorem amplitudinem et extensionem. Propter quod dicit philosophus, III de anima, quod anima est quodammodo omnia.*

<sup>197</sup> Robbie Moser, ‘Thomas Aquinas, Esse Intentionale, and the Cognitive as Such’, *The Review of Metaphysics* 64:4 (2011), 764. Moser himself disagrees with this interpretation of Aquinas, but for present purposes I will follow the standard interpretation for the sake of brevity.

natural form.<sup>198</sup> Accordingly, Aquinas is arguing that cognizant things have in some sense more potential for knowledge because they can represent, or have ideas about, forms other than their own. To be a knower is to have the capacity to possess the forms other being.

The aforementioned distinction between substance and idea can help us flesh out this idea further. Aquinas attempts to clarify his view by arguing that cognition is a feature of the immaterial. This allusion to his dualism seems gratuitous since it is commonly accepted that ideas are immaterial,<sup>199</sup> but Aquinas is keen to stress that ideas are immaterial entities and that that which knows is immaterial. He writes:

We must conclude, therefore, that material things must needs exist in the knower, not materially, but immaterially. The reason of this is, because the act of knowledge extends to things even that are external to us. Now by matter the form of a thing is determined to some one thing. Wherefore it is clear that knowledge is in inverse ratio of materiality. And consequently things that are not receptive of forms save materially, have no power of knowledge whatever [...] But the more immaterially a thing receives the form of the thing known, the more perfect is its knowledge [...] It is therefore clear from the foregoing, that if there be an intellect which knows all things by its essence, then its essence must needs have all things in itself immaterially [...] Now this is proper to God, that His Essence comprise all things immaterially, as effects pre-exist virtually in their cause. God alone, therefore, understand all things through His Essence.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> A concise explication of this distinction can also be found in: G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers: Augustine, Aquinas, Frege* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), 95.

<sup>199</sup> On Aquinas' dualism, see: David S. Oderberg, 'Hylemorphic Dualism', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 22:2 (2005), *passim*; and David S. Oderberg, *Real Essentialism* (Routledge: New York, 2007), 243ff. Alfred Freddoso objects to the terminology of hylemorphism, but has nonetheless defended Thomistic dualism, see: Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Oh My Soul, There's Animals and Animals: Some Thomistic Reflections on Contemporary Philosophy of Mind', Mount Saint Mary College, June 2011, <<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/Oh%20My%20Soul.pdf>>, (accessed: 09/10/2019).

<sup>200</sup> *ST*, I, Q84, A2. Latin: *Relinquitur ergo quod oportet materialia cognita in cognoscente existere non materialiter, sed magis immaterialiter. Et huius ratio est, quia actus cognitionis se extendit ad ea quae sunt extra cognoscentem, cognoscimus enim etiam ea quae extra nos sunt. Per materiam autem determinatur forma rei ad aliquid unum. Unde manifestum est quod ratio cognitionis ex opposito se habet ad rationem materialitatis. Et ideo*



For Aquinas, then, non-cognitive things have their form, but nothing else. They are just material things. The cognitive is non-material, and so if purely material things can have no cognition, the inverse must be true: purely non-material things must have purer cognition. It follows, for Aquinas, that God's knowledge of things must be *a priori* since His knowledge must be perfect; they must be held in His essence, rather than derived from sensory experience of the material world. That is to say, more concretely, that God must know directly rather than via abstraction.

In this, Aquinas' model of cognition differs between God and humans – after all, Aquinas also argues that God's knowledge is (to use an almost tautological phrase) possessed in the divine mode, so as to distinguish it from the knowledge of created beings. Human knowledge, for example, can be habitual, potential, universal, or particular. These are so-called 'modes' of knowledge. While God has knowledge, His knowledge is possessed in the higher divine mode and therefore incommensurable with human knowledge. The human modes of knowledge are not strictly applicable; God has complete and incomparable knowledge.<sup>201</sup> To illustrate, in human cognition, understanding is an incomplete process. Humans possess some knowledge or understanding but have potential to acquire more and further furnish their intellectual landscapes. By contrast:

God has nothing in Him of pure potentiality, but is pure act, His intellect and its object are altogether the same; so that He neither is without the intelligible species [viz. the

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*quae non recipiunt formas nisi materialiter, nullo modo sunt cognoscitiva, sicut plantae; ut dicitur in II libro de anima. Quanto autem aliquid immaterialius habet formam rei cognitae, tanto perfectius cognoscit. Unde et intellectus, qui abstrahit speciem non solum a materia, sed etiam a materialibus conditionibus individuantes, perfectius cognoscit quam sensus, qui accipit formam rei cognitae sine materia quidem, sed cum materialibus conditionibus. Et inter ipsos sensus, visus est magis cognoscitivus, quia est minus materialis, ut supra dictum est. Et inter ipsos intellectus, tanto quilibet est perfectior, quanto immaterialior. Ex his ergo patet quod, si aliquis intellectus est qui per essentiam suam cognoscit omnia, oportet quod essentia eius habeat in se immaterialiter omnia; sicut antiqui posuerunt essentiam animae actu componi ex principiis omnium materialium, ut cognosceret omnia. Hoc autem est proprium Dei, ut sua essentia sit immaterialiter comprehensiva omnium, prout effectus virtute praexistunt in causa.*

<sup>201</sup> ST, I, Q14, A1.

mental representations which Aquinas considers to be like form], as is the case with our intellect when it understands potentially; nor does the intelligible species differ from the substance of the divine intellect, as it differs our intellect when it understands actually; but the intelligible species itself is the divine intellect itself.<sup>202</sup>

God has complete actual knowledge, whereas all other intelligent agents have a cocktail of potential and actual knowledge. Humans come to know when their cognitive potential is actualized, whereas God knows all things because He has exhaustive actual knowledge. Although Aquinas expounds this idea during a critique of Aristotle, the rationale relies fundamentally about an Aristotelian conception of motion whereby change is a relation of potentiality and actuality.<sup>203</sup> It is by relying on Aristotle's theory that Aquinas takes God's changelessness to derive from His total actuality. God cannot change since He has no potential to actualise. As such, His corpus of knowledge is likewise changeless on the basis that His intellect and its objects are an essential part of Him.

To bring some of these strains of thought together, we may say that, for Aquinas, to know is to possess the form or idea of some other thing, and that things can either be known materially or immaterially (viz. through one's essence) It is more perfect to possess knowledge immaterially, and God has perfect knowledge, to say that 'God knows X' is to say that 'God possess the form of X by virtue of His essence, in which He possesses actual knowledge of all things'.

Having spoken much about 'essence' in a loose sense of that which makes God 'God', the concept needs further explication. Aquinas argues that God's "act of understanding must be

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<sup>202</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A2. Latin: *Cum igitur Deus nihil potentialitatis habeat, sed sit actus purus, oportet quod in eo intellectus et intellectum sint idem omnibus modis, ita scilicet, ut neque careat specie intelligibili, sicut intellectus noster cum intelligit in potentia; neque species intelligibilis sit aliud a substantia intellectus divini, sicut accidit in intellectu nostro, cum est actu intelligens; sed ipsa species intelligibilis est ipse intellectus divinus. Et sic seipsum per seipsum intelligit.*

<sup>203</sup> Aquinas refers to *Liber de Causis* (originally published in Arabic as: *Kiāb al-Īdāh li-Aristūṭālīs fī l-khayr al-maḥḍ*), which is attributed to Aristotle but, in fact, likely is the work of an anonymous 9<sup>th</sup> century Arabic neo-Platonist.

His essence and His existence.”<sup>204</sup> The act of understanding, Aquinas reminds his reader, “remains in the operator as his own act and perfection; as existence is the perfection of the one existing.”<sup>205</sup>

For something to have ‘being’, it must have ‘existence’ and ‘essence’. Being, then, is a composite state. ‘Essence’ refers to the quiddity of an object, that thing that makes a particular part of a universal class of the same kind. As Edward Feser puts it: “The essence of a thing is its nature, that whereby it is what it is. It is what we grasp intellectually when we identify a thing’s genus and specific difference.”<sup>206</sup> Existence is conceptualised by Aquinas in terms of ‘esse’; it is the *act of being*, that which makes something to be. It actualises the potency the essence of a thing, much in the same way form actualises matter.

Aquinas also states: “For just as *esse* follows upon a form, so an act of understanding follows upon an intelligible species.”<sup>207</sup> A great difficulty is understanding how to interpret what Aquinas means by ‘follow upon’. Following John Whipple, I will take it that Aquinas “held that the *esse* of a thing follows upon its form, not so as to be efficiently caused by that form, but so as to be formally caused by it.”<sup>208</sup> With that in mind, Aquinas’ argument seems to be just as an act of being results from form (in that form is necessary for an act of being) so too does an act of understanding result from a mental possession of form (intelligible species). Just as the act of being is part of an agent, something that perfects it, so too is the act of understanding. So, when Aquinas says the act of understanding remains within the agent as part of his actuality and perfection, he means that it becomes part the actual agent; the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, therefore, actualises a potency in him.

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<sup>204</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A4.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>206</sup> Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Editiones Scholasticae: Piscataway, 2014), 211.

<sup>207</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A4.

<sup>208</sup> John F. Whipple, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas, II* (Washington D.C., 2007), 192.

What all this amounts to, for Aquinas, is an equivocation of the divine intellect, the divine essence, that which is known, and the very act of understanding.<sup>209</sup> By ‘equivocation’, what is meant is these are intrinsically tied together. Just as the constituent persons of the Trinity are distinct in some sense, they are also intrinsically unified in a substantive way such that they are the same. God has knowledge of all things because His essence is inseparable from His knowledge. Aquinas explains:

[W]e say that God sees Himself in Himself, because He sees Himself through His essence; and He sees other things not in themselves, but in Himself; inasmuch as His essence contains the similitude of things other than Himself.<sup>210</sup>

To synthesise some of these diverse lines of argument, what God knows, He knows *in Himself* (that is, in His own mode of knowing). God’s knowledge proceeds from His essence; His act of understanding – wholly actually – is part of the divine quiddity. The image or representation of something is “in God is nothing but His own essence in which all images of things are comprehended.”<sup>211</sup> Moreover, God’s knowledge presents itself as mental forms – call them intelligible species, ideas, or images– in the mind of God that correspond to created things.

This ‘correspondence’ must be construed loosely, for Aquinas maintains that God’s knowledge extends also to potential existence. He writes: “[I]f God knows completely the power and perfection of His essence; His knowledge extends not only to the things that are but also the things that are not.”<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A4.

<sup>210</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A5. Latin: *Sic igitur dicendum est quod Deus seipsum videt in seipso, quia seipsum videt per essentiam suam. Alia autem a se videt non in ipsis, sed in seipso, inquantum essentia sua continet similitudinem aliorum ab ipso.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, Chapter 66, §5. All *SCG* citations are from Anton C. Pegis’ translation: < <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles1.htm#66>>.

Thus, God's knowledge is not merely the knowledge of existents, but also of non-existents. For Aquinas, this follows from the fact that God is the first cause, for "whatever effects pre-exist in God, as in the first cause, must be in His act of understanding, and all things must be in Him according to an intelligible mode."<sup>213</sup> Since God has complete knowledge from eternity, His act of understanding must encompass all that ever *could* be, as well as every that *is*. Thus, God can have knowledge of non-existents provided they are possibles (i.e., that they could possibly exist; Aquinas is not committed to the possible existence of impossible non-existents).

However, Aquinas distinguishes between two types of non-existents: those that simply do not exist, and those that have existed or will exist at some point in the future. God's knowledge of these two classes is not identical. Aquinas explains:

Now a certain difference is to be noted in the consideration of those things that are not actual [that is, non-existents]. For some of them may not be in act now, still they were, or will be; and God is said to know all these with the knowledge of vision: for since God's act of understanding, which is His being, is measured by eternity; and since eternity is measured without succession, comprehending all time, the presence glance of God extends over all time, and to all things which exist at any time, as to objects present to Him. But there are other things in God's power, or the creature's, which nevertheless are not, nor will be, nor were; and as regards these, He is said to have the knowledge, not of vision, but of simple intelligence. This is so called because the things we see around us have distinct being outside the seer."<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> *ST*, Q14, A4.

<sup>214</sup> *ST*, Q14, A9. Latin: *Sed horum quae actu non sunt, est attendenda quaedam diversitas. Qaedam enim, licet non sint nunc in actu, tamen vel fuerunt vel erunt, et omnia ista dicitur Deus scire scientia visionis. Quia, cum intelligere Dei, quod est eius esse, aeternitate mensuretur, quae sine successione existens totum tempus comprehendit, praesens intuitus Dei fertur in totum tempus, et in omnia quae sunt in quocumque tempore, sicut in subiecta sibi praesentialiter. Qaedam vero sunt, quae sunt in potentia Dei vel creaturae, quae tamen nec sunt nec erunt neque fuerunt. Et respectu horum non dicitur habere scientiam visionis, sed simplicis intelligentiae. Quod ideo dicitur, quia ea quae videntur apud nos, habent esse distinctum extra videntem.*

To understand this, it is worth providing some context about Aquinas' theory of time. As the above passage indicates, Aquinas believes God's mode of being is measured by the eternal. On this view, there are two modes of being: the eternal and temporal. According to the eternal mode of being, God exists timelessly (that is, outside the very notion of time) and infinitely. He exists in a mode in which there is no temporal succession. This idea, which Robert Pasnau has helpfully associated with what he termed "holochronically timelessness",<sup>215</sup> is not new to Aquinas. It finds its pedigree in the Christian tradition to at least Boethius' notion of *inteminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessione*,<sup>216</sup> and it features in Augustine and Anselm before Aquinas, and in Jean Calvin and Luis de Molina after him.<sup>217</sup> In more modern terms, the eternal mode is often seen as somewhat analogous to what is in McTaggart's terminology a B-theory of time,<sup>218</sup> though this is a problematic for reasons which we will explore later. For now, it is helpful to note that Harm Goris has highlighted one such problem with this view which is that it conflates things being 'there' in the future and God being 'there' in the future.<sup>219</sup> By contrast, the temporal mode existence is the mode in which most of God's creation reside, humans include. It is the actual world, tensed, finite, imbued with temporal succession, and a discrete series of moments in time.

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<sup>215</sup> Robert Pasnau, 'On Existing All at Once', in: Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (eds.), *God, Eternity, and Time* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2011), *passim*.

<sup>216</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. Douglas C. Langston (New York, 2010), 89-90 (Book 5, Prose 6).

<sup>217</sup> For Augustine, see: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), 228 (Book XI, xi, 13). For Anselm, see: Saint Anselm, *Proslogium; Monologium; an Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Guaiilon; and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (Chicago, 1939), 25 (Chapter XIX). For Calvin, see: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia, 1813), 145 (Book III, Chapter XXI). For Molina, see: Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, 1988), 99 (Disputation 48, §2).

<sup>218</sup> See, for example, Delmas Lewis, 'Eternity, Time, and Timelessness', *Faith and Philosophy* 5:1 (1988), 72-86; and, from a different perspective: William Lane Craig, 'Was Thomas Aquinas a B-Theorist of Time?', *The New Scholasticism*, 59.4 (1985), 475-83. Craig argues that Aquinas was not a B-theorist but that his framework requires B-theory to be true to make sense.

<sup>219</sup> Harm J. M. J. Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will* (Nijmegen, 1996), 247, fn. 65.

Aquinas, then, believes that in His eternal mode, God knows non-existents within the temporal series by virtue of His knowledge of vision (*scientia visionis*), and non-existents outside of the temporal series by virtue of His simple knowledge (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*). His simple knowledge is essentially knowledge of possibilities; it is what God knows He could produce, were He inclined to do so. To illustrate, suppose there has never been, is not, nor ever will a British Prime Minister called Bugs Bunny. Prime Minister Bunny would properly be said to belong to God's simple knowledge. S/he is merely a potential existent outside of the temporal mode. However, suppose that in twenty years there will in fact be such a Prime Minister, then that fact would properly be said to belong to God's knowledge of vision.

Thus, God's knowledge is divisible first into knowledge of existents and non-existents, and the latter is then divisible into two categories. Consequently, God may be said to know future events by virtue of His knowledge of vision – the future may not yet exist (in the temporal mode) but it is present to God (in the eternal mode). To be sure, this is not to say God exists in both modes, but His knowledge within the eternal mode provides Him with knowledge of the temporal mode.

All of this raises an important question: where does Aquinas locate the truth value of propositions? Earlier, it was noted that God's knowledge involves representations that correspond to actual things – existent or non-existent – in the created order. This would seem to imply a correspondence theory of truth. However, just what version of the correspondence theory of truth Aquinas subscribed too is more of an enigma to solve.

Aquinas, allegedly borrowing his definition from Isaac Israeli, famously declared that “truth is ‘an equation of thing and intellect.’”<sup>220</sup> This idea – which Aquinas regarded as the purest, if not

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<sup>220</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, Q4, A6. All citations from *De Veritate* are from: <https://dhsprory.org/thomas/english/QDdeVer1.htm>, (accessed: 01/01/2020). As Marian David has noted, there is no evidence of this formulation in Israeli's work (see: Marian David, “The Correspondence Theory of Truth”, 2015, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 28/05/2015, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth->

the only, level of understanding of truth - requires some exposition. Aquinas first considers truth in his *Commentary of the Sentences*, where he suggests that there are three kinds of things: mind-dependent things (such as dreams), mind-independent things (such as the tree in the orchard), and things which – in Wippel’s words – have “a foundation in extramental reality, but depends on the intellect’s operation for its complete and formal realization.”<sup>221</sup> Truth, Aquinas argues, belongs to this third class, along with universals.

The truth of some thing, then, consists of the realisation of that thing’s *esse* in the intellect. Truth, formally, belongs to the intellect, but things themselves can be analogically said to be true insofar as they can produce truth in the intellect. In *De Veritate*, he declares:

[T]rue is predicated primarily of a true intellect and secondarily of a thing conformed with intellect. True taken in either sense, however, is interchangeable with being, but in different ways. Used of things, it can be interchanged with being through a judgment asserting merely material identity, for every being is conformed with the divine intellect and can be conformed with a human intellect. The converse of this is also true.<sup>222</sup>

However, this seems enigmatic insofar as our present question as to the grounding of the truth of propositions is concerned. When do propositions become true or false? As Craig exasperatedly complains, “[t]he ambiguity [in Aquinas’ discussion of truth values] is frustrating to the reader of Aquinas.”<sup>223</sup> However, the theory provides some insight, at least in relation to God’s knowledge.

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correspondence/>, (accessed: 01/10/2019). On this conception of truth, also see: John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington DC, 2007), Ch.3

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>222</sup> *De Veritate*, Q1, A2. Latin: *sicut ex iam dictis patet, verum per prius dicitur de intellectu vero, et per posterius de re sibi adaequata; et utroque modo convertitur cum ente, sed diversimode, quia secundum quod dicitur de rebus, convertitur cum ente per praedicationem: omne enim ens est adaequatum intellectui divino, et potens adaequare sibi intellectum humanum, et e converso.*

<sup>223</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden, 1988), 108.



God's intellect is perfect and complete, for Aquinas. That entails that it possesses perfect truth. Since God's intellect cannot change, it must follow that truth about things is true from eternity. Indeed, Aquinas writes:

In this latter way, all things receive the name true from the first truth; and since truth in the intellect is measured by things themselves, it follows that not only the truth of things, but also the truth of the intellect or of a proposition signifying what is understood, gets its name from the first truth. In this commensuration or conformity of intellect and thing it is not necessary that each of the two actually exist. Our intellect can be in conformity with things that, although not existing now, will exist in the future.

Otherwise, it would not be true to say that "the Anti-Christ will be born." Hence, a proposition is said to be true because of the truth that is in the intellect alone even when the thing stated does not exist. Similarly, the divine intellect can be in conformity with things that did not exist eternally but were created in time; thus, those in time can be said to be true from eternity because of the eternal truth.<sup>224</sup>

For Aquinas, then, at least for our purposes, the truth of propositions is determined from eternity. What is particularly interesting is that for Aquinas, the truth of some proposition is not contingent upon the propositions accurately describing some state of affairs in the world.

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<sup>224</sup> DV, Q1, A5. Latin: *Unde et aliquid potest denominari verum dupliciter: uno modo a veritate inhaerente; alio modo ab extrinseca veritate: et sic denominantur omnes res verae a prima veritate. Et quia veritas quae est in intellectu, mensuratur a rebus ipsis; sequitur quod non solum veritas rei, sed etiam veritas intellectus, vel enuntiationis, quae intellectum significat, a veritate prima denominetur. In hac autem adaequatione vel commensuratione intellectus ac rei non requiritur quod utrumque extremorum sit in actu. Intellectus enim noster potest nunc adaequari his quae in futurum erunt, nunc autem non sunt; aliter non esset haec vera: Antichristus nascetur; unde hoc denominatur verum a veritate quae est in intellectu tantum, etiam quando non est res ipsa. Similiter etiam intellectus divinus adaequari potuit ab aeterno his quae ab aeterno non fuerunt, sed in tempore sunt facta; et sic ea quae sunt in tempore, denominari possunt vera ab aeterno a veritate aeterna.*

Rather, Aquinas' view of the truth of propositions as a correspondence is that propositions are true insofar as they correspond to the divine intellect, not the actual world.

However, a further question needs answering: is the truth of propositions, including future propositions, contingent or necessary? *Prima facie*, if truth is rooted in the divine intellect, it would seem that the truth value is necessary since God cannot be wrong. However, this allows no space for the possibility that God could have decreed otherwise. Aquinas, particularly in *De Veritate*, is keen to maintain contingency. How is it possible to reconcile these two notions of the contingency of the future and God's infallibility? Aquinas provides a clue:

[I]t is clear that a contingent can be known as future by no cognition that excludes all falsity and the possibility of falsity; and since there is no falsity or possibility of falsity in the divine knowledge, it would be impossible for God to have knowledge of future contingents *if He knew them as future*. Now, something is known as future when an order of past and future stands between the event and the knowledge. This order, however, cannot be found between the divine knowledge and any contingent thing whatsoever; but the relation of the divine knowledge to anything whatsoever is like that of present to present.<sup>225</sup>

The caveat 'if He knew them as future' is crucial here. Aquinas seems to suggest that God cannot necessarily know future contingents *qua* future, but that does not preclude him knowing them *qua* eternal. This seems to lend credence to Anthony Kenny's assertion that, for Aquinas, future-tense propositions in the temporal mode lack a truth value since the truth value is merely fixed in the eternal mode (as opposed to temporal mode), whereas in the eternal mode, the

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<sup>225</sup> *DV*, Q2, A12. Italicisations mine.

propositions possess – and God knows – the truth value.<sup>226</sup> Craig finds this reading of Aquinas to be mistaken, arguing that Kenny is confusing truth values themselves with God’s knowledge of them. For Aquinas, Craig argues, the truth values of future contingent propositions exist, but they are simply not knowable. He writes: “Thomas’s answer [...] appears to be that future contingent singular propositions are not certainly knowable to be true or false. If God were in time, He could not know for certain the truth of such propositions. But in His eternity, the events of the future are present to Him and, hence, propositions about them can certainly be known to be true or false.”<sup>227</sup>

In resolving this dispute, it is worth noting that both Kenny and Craig rightly point out that *qua eternity* God knows the truth values of all singular contingent propositions, whatever their location on the temporal spectrum. That is not disputed. The dispute, then, is if such future contingent propositions have a truth value at all. If we return to *De Veritate*, Aquinas provides us with an insight: “Although a contingent is not determined as long as it is, future, yet, as soon as it is produced in the realm of nature, it has a determinate truth.”<sup>228</sup> This suggests that, for Aquinas, future singular contingents *in time* become unchangeably true as the state of affairs which the proposition describes obtains. This suggests, *contra* Craig, that such propositions lack a truth value until they obtain. Such contingents are contingent precisely because of the indeterminacy of their truth values *in time* – the future, in time, is open. Some contingent thing is itself contingent as it lacks a determinate truth value, but God’s knowledge of it, the equation of thing and intellect, provides it with a determinate truth value *from eternity*. Aquinas’ escape from the fatalist dilemma, then, is – in Craig’s words – “that the timeless truth of propositions

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<sup>226</sup> Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford, 1979), 54-5.

<sup>227</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 110.

<sup>228</sup> *DV*, Q2, A12.

known by God does not eliminate the contingency of events corresponding to these propositions.<sup>229</sup>

However, does this not entail a contradiction? How can a contingent proposition be necessary?

Aquinas responds:

Contingency is therefore said to be necessary, according to how it is known by God, because it is known by him according to what is already present, but not according to what is to come. Nevertheless, no necessity arises from the fact that it is going to be, so that one could say that it comes about necessarily; for *event* applies to something which is to be, because what already is cannot eventuate. But that it has happened is true, and this is necessary.<sup>230</sup>

Aquinas appeals here, of course, to a distinction between *de dicto* and *de re*, a distinction which appears to originate with Abelard.<sup>231</sup> If we return to the *Summa*, Aquinas writes:

[T]his proposition, *Everything known by God must necessarily be*, is usually distinguished; for this may refer to the thing, or to the saying. If it refers to the thing, it is divided, and false; for the sense is, *Everything God knows is necessary*. If understood of the saying it is composite and true; for the sense is, *This proposition “that which is known by God is” is necessary*.<sup>232</sup>

It is by relying on this distinction that Aquinas can argue that a contingent proposition can have a determinate truth value. What emerges, as J.J. MacIntosh has argued, are two distinct modal

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<sup>229</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 110.

<sup>230</sup> *DV*, Q2, A12, Ad. 3.

<sup>231</sup> J. J. MacIntosh, *The Arguments of Aquinas: A Philosophical View* (Abingdon, 2017), 17ff.

<sup>232</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A13.

categories: absolute necessity and conditional contingency. The former corresponds to *de re* necessity and the latter to *de dicto* necessity.<sup>233</sup> It seems that when Aquinas speaks of the necessity of future propositions, He means it in this conditional sense. It is wrong to say, for example, ‘God knows P necessarily’, but it is quite right to say, ‘if P, then God knows P’. The conditional maintains contingency.

## II. God’s Foreknowledge

The preceding discussion has already touched on God’s knowledge of the future, for Aquinas. However, in this section, it is worthwhile to apply his more general theory of divine knowledge to God’s foreknowledge more explicitly.

As noted, Aquinas follows Boethius in adopting the notion of ‘eternal vision’. According to the doctrine of ‘eternal vision’, God does not experience events in a temporal succession; rather, He experiences all time as a single, simultaneous moment. The past, present, and future all appear to God as though they were present. This has been interpreted as what would now be called a B-theory of time, namely, the view that “temporal becoming is merely a subjective feature of consciousness, not the successive actualization of states of affairs.”<sup>234</sup> However, as Goris notes, this would be a rather queer reading of Aquinas since such an interpretation would require the absurd assertion that Aquinas “raise[s] the problem of foreknowledge by presupposing a tensed theory with an open, indeterminate future, but allegedly solve[s] the problem by adopting a tenseless theory, in which whatever is later than this moment is in itself

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<sup>233</sup> MacIntosh, *Arguments of Aquinas*, 17.

<sup>234</sup> William Lane Craig, ‘Was Thomas Aquinas a B-Theorist of Time?’, *The New Scholasticism* 59:4 (1985), 475.

as determinate and real as what is earlier.”<sup>235</sup> Rather, Aquinas’ view seems to be the creatures exist in a tensed states, that temporal succession is real, but that “God’s present vision carries through to the whole of time and to all things that exist at any time whatsoever, insofar as they are subject to that vision in their presentness.”<sup>236</sup> Aquinas does not deny the real ontology of tense, nor that God knows the temporal order of succession; his view is merely about God’s perception of events.

Through this vision of knowledge, God knows future singular contingents, although they do not exist properly nor do they have truth values, because “God knows all things; not only things actual but also things possible to Him and the creatures.”<sup>237</sup> To illustrate, take the proposition ‘in 3000, Erika will buy a space car’. For human creatures, this proposition is neither true nor false, so far as Aquinas is concerned. It is not merely the case that the truth of proposition is unknowable; it simply lacks a truth value altogether since it describes a state of affairs that is yet to obtain. The car and Erika, and indeed the relation between them, are non-existents. However, God knows non-existents (of both kinds detailed earlier), and therefore in the eternal mode inhabited by God, the proposition is true. This is because God experiences Erika’s purchasing of the car as present. Aquinas explains:

[A]lthough contingent things become actual successively, nevertheless God knows contingent things not successively as they are in their own being, as we do; but simultaneously. The reason is because His knowledge is measured by eternity [...] because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality [sic.]. Hence it is manifest that contingent things are infallibly known by

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<sup>235</sup> Goris, ‘Divine Foreknowledge’, 108.

<sup>236</sup> *ST*, 1, Q14, A9.

<sup>237</sup> *ST*, 1, Q14, A13.

God, inasmuch as they are subject to the divine sight in their presentiality [presentness]; yet they are future contingent things in relation to their own causes.<sup>238</sup>

God's foreknowledge is not so much knowledge of the future, but knowledge of the temporal future via His divine vision. We must, therefore, say God knows and acts timelessly on Aquinas' account. This would seem to suggest that truth is eternal – but does that not conflict with divine aseity? It would, if truth were in some sense apart from God, but “the truth of the divine intellect is God himself.”<sup>239</sup> Truth in God and God Himself, therefore, are co-extensive.

This talk of eternal or timeless truth might seem to sit uneasily with the kind of contingency one wants to affirm if one is to repel the theological fatalist. However, as noted earlier, the knowledge of God's vision is necessary, but – as Aquinas is keen to stress – that does not necessarily undermine the contingency of things in the actual world since they are contingent in relation to their own causes. In light of that, propositions pertaining to future states of affairs or things must be contingent.

While this contingency is sufficient to dispense with the theological fatalism dilemma since the dilemma relies on some future state of affairs being necessary in the absolute sense which Aquinas rejects, it is important to understand not only that the account preserves creaturely freedom, but also how. In a different context, David Hunt has argued “the future is *epistemically* settled in the divine mind, but it does not follow that the future is *causally* settled in a way that conflict with human freedom.”<sup>240</sup> This is helpful but the notion that the future

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid. Latin: *Et licet contingentia fiant in actu successive, non tamen Deus successive cognoscit contingentia, prout sunt in suo esse, sicut nos, sed simul. Quia sua cognitio mensuratur aeternitate, sicut etiam suum esse, aeternitas autem, tota simul existens, ambit totum tempus, ut supra dictum est. Unde omnia quae sunt in tempore, sunt Deo ab aeterno praesentia, non solum ea ratione qua habet rationes rerum apud se praesentes, ut quidam dicunt, sed quia eius intuitus fertur ab aeterno super omnia, prout sunt in sua praesentialitate. Unde manifestum est quod contingentia et infallibiliter a Deo cognoscuntur, inquantum subduntur divino conspectui secundum suam praesentialitatem, et tamen sunt futura contingentia, suis causis comparata.*

<sup>239</sup> ST, 1, Q16, A7; cf. ST, 1, Q16, A5.

<sup>240</sup> David Hunt, ‘A Simple Foreknowledge Response’, in: James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (eds.), *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, 2001), 53.

epistemically settled and how that allows the future to remain *causally* unsettled since God's knowledge does not require a fixed temporal future is not satisfactory. Rather, we ought to say that the future is both epistemically settled in the divine mind and causally settled, but that it is causally settled in light of free human agency. It is important then to explore how God operates causally for Aquinas.

In conducting such an exploration, the fact that Aquinas' view changed over time makes interpretation awkward.<sup>241</sup> What I articulate here is what I deem to be Aquinas' clearest view. Crudely put, Aquinas is fundamentally an instrumentalist or concurrentist – as virtually all later medieval thinkers were – in that he believed that God was causally involved in the operations of secondary causes. To be more specific, this view holds that both God and natural substances both contribute to the immediate production of some natural effect. The created substance determines the specific character of the transeunt effect, but God is a necessary and immediate causal agent without whom the effect could not be produced.<sup>242</sup> As such, while Aquinas does not want to conceive of knowledge as causal *ipso facto*, he believes God's knowledge is necessary for his causal act, as shown by his analogy between God and a craftsman:

I answer that: The knowledge of God is the cause of things. For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art. Now the knowledge of the artificer is the cause of the things made by his art from the fact that the artificer works by his intellect. Hence the form of the intellect must be the principle of action; as heat is the principle of heating.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Goris, 'Divine Foreknowledge', 112-13.

<sup>242</sup> On this, see Alfred Freddoso's valuable survey of occasionalism, mere conservationism, and concurrentism in medieval and early modern philosophy: Alfred J. Freddoso, 'God's General Concurrence With Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is Not Enough', *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), 553-85 (especially 554-55).

<sup>243</sup> *ST*, 1, Q14, A8. Latin: *Respondeo dicendum quod scientia Dei est causa rerum. Sic enim scientia Dei se habet ad omnes res creatas, sicut scientia artificis se habet ad artificiata. Scientia autem artificis est causa artificiatorum, eo quod artifex operatur per suum intellectum, unde oportet quod forma intellectus sit principium operationis, sicut calor est principium calefactionis.*



God, like the craftsman, is an efficient cause (in the Aristotelian sense). Like a craftsman, he takes an idea (a form) and uses it to engage in production of some sort. Intellectual understanding is a composite of the intellect and its object (note how this fundamental epistemological framework of the equation pervades Aquinas' thinking).

Elsewhere, Aquinas writes:

[L]ikewise, the intelligible form does not denote a principle of action in so far as it resides in the one who understands unless there is added to it the inclination to an effect, which inclination is through the will.<sup>244</sup>

This remark is illustrative. As the efficient cause, God has to 'will' something for it to produce an effect; mere possession of knowledge is not causal. However, once God wills something, it becomes temporally necessary in the manner specified earlier. This thesis that God is the efficient cause of all things has worried many philosophers, particularly Craig. Craig argues that Aquinas is a determinist who "flees into the arms of divine determinism. In maintaining that God's knowledge is the cause of everything God does, Thomas transforms the universe into a nexus which [...] is causally determined from above, thus eliminating human freedom."<sup>245</sup> It is difficult to see Craig's cause for concern here for any theist, himself included, will be committed to the claim that God's knowledge informs His action (since knowledge is non-causal, it could not directly cause His action in any case). There is also no logical implication of this that necessarily violates human freedom. As such, Craig's worry is difficult to understand and will likely trouble the Thomist as little as it troubles his preferred theory of responding to fatalism.

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<sup>244</sup> *ST*, 1, Q14, A8. Latin: *Et similiter forma intelligibilis non nominat principium actionis secundum quod est tantum in intelligente, nisi adiungatur ei inclinatio ad effectum, quae est per voluntatem.*

<sup>245</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 126.

Whatever the logical consequences of Aquinas' theory, and we shall evaluate that in the next section, Aquinas certainly did not regard it as deterministic. In terms of the mechanism of being causally involved, Aquinas maintains that both God and the creature are fully causally operative in the production of some effect, but that they do so in different modes. While God plays a more prominent role in the production of a secondary cause's effect than the secondary cause itself than, say, an occasionalist would hypothesise,<sup>246</sup> he does not take away freedom. As indicated just now, I am myself inclined to think Craig over-states the causal input of God. Aquinas' view seems to be that God moves some secondary cause towards the attainment of certain perfections (viz. in a process of a quasi-Aristotelian process of motion such as was discussed earlier), but Aquinas always intends this as an inclination towards some effect, not as deterministic. David Oderberg's example of teaching a child to write seems to better capture what Aquinas has in mind; God guides, rather than compels.<sup>247</sup> This is not of course to say that Aquinas' account is correct, but if it is correct, it would entail that Aquinas is not advocating determinism. Rather, he would be entertaining a form of compatibilism between divine 'determinism' and freedom from determination by secondary causes.

Moreover, as a cursory remark, if Aquinas were a determinist, his suggestion that God is causally involved in creaturely action by (i) imbuing the creature with power to act, (ii) preserving the aforementioned power, and (iii) moving the creature to act (actualisation), would be quite strange since it renders such God-given power redundant.

To put Aquinas' view shortly, God's knowledge is essential to His causal relations. He is an instrumentalist who believes that God is causally involved in the production of all secondary effects through the mechanisms stipulated in (i)-(iii). God is the efficient cause of all things, but

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<sup>246</sup> Louis A. Mancha Jr., 'Aquinas, Suarez, and Malebranche on Instrumental Causation and Premotion', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52:3 (2012), 338.

<sup>247</sup> David S. Oderberg, 'Divine Premotion', *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 79 (2016), 214-215.

not deliberately deterministic. However, once God engages in a causal act, the subsequent effects are temporally necessary. Furthermore, God's causal role may be greater than that of the secondary cause in the production of some effect, but production of said effect is a collaborative effect in which both God and creature are – in different modes – engaged fully in a causally efficacious function. Moreover, while God's knowledge is itself non-causal, it is a necessary condition for God to act.

As a final word on this relation between knowledge and causality, it is worth considering whether Aquinas was a premotionist. Louis A. Mancha Jr. has argued quite forcefully that Aquinas was not a premotionist.<sup>248</sup> By contrast, David Oderberg has suggested that Mancha's thesis relies on an erroneous Suarezian account of premotion; properly construed, Aquinas is a (physical) premotionist.<sup>249</sup>

Given the dispute is quite heavily centred on Suarez' account, it is worth expounding. Mancha's Suarezian definition is difficult to extract but he seems to consider a 'premotion' to be:

- (a) God's concurrence is a principle (or power) brought about within the creature, prior to the creature acting, by God Himself.
- (b) the principle (or power) received by the creature is incomplete, but necessary for the creature to act (indeed, it is only a necessary condition).
- (c) the principle (power) is *accidental* in the Thomistic sense (as opposed to natural power).
- (d) the principle (power) only resides in the creature during the action.

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<sup>248</sup> Mancha, 'Aquinas', 350-53.

<sup>249</sup> Oderberg, 'Divine Premotion', 207-22.

Mancha then argues that the premotionist view can be articulated as:

- (i) “By giving each thing its power to act, which is a result of His creating it”
- (ii) “By preserving the power to act in each thing, at each moment that it exists.”
- (iii) “By moving the thing to act, that is, by applying the power of the creature to an action, ‘as a man causes the knife’s cutting by the very fact that he applies the sharpness of the knife to cutting by moving it to cut.’”<sup>250</sup>
- (iv) The principal agent causes the action of its instrument

Assuming this exhausts Mancha’s account for premotionism (the principle here is what has been called a ‘premotion’ – the power by which a creature acts), the general idea here is that God brings, by a premotion, secondary causes to act, just as a craftsman brings his tools to act upon some material. (iv) is the explicitly premotionist thesis, but premotionists hold to (i-iii) – which is also the Aquinian instrumentalism thesis. According to Mancha, Thomists (not Aquinas himself)<sup>251</sup> posit ‘premotion’ as a way of distinguishing (iii) and (iv).

Mancha does not contest that Aquinas holds to (i)-(iii); rather he – following Suarez – takes two issues: first, (iv) is only suggested by a vague passage in *De Potentia*, so is unlikely to be his view; and second, where (iv) is suggested, Aquinas is actually providing a qualifier that “allows for the possibility that intelligent creatures can somehow initiate the specifying conditions, though not the being itself, in a concurrent cause” without the need to appeal to some doctrine of pre-motion.<sup>252</sup> As such, Aquinas is not a premotionist.

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<sup>250</sup> Mancha, ‘Aquinas’, 339-49. All three quotes are from that reference.

<sup>251</sup> Mancha seems to suggest that Aquinas was possibly a premotionist when authoring *De Potentia*, though it is not clear that he is because he qualifies (iv), but later abandoned the view (because it does not reoccur).

<sup>252</sup> Mancha, ‘Aquinas’, 351.

Oderberg rejects Mancha's assessment. Firstly, Oderberg argues that the absence of many articulations of the premotionist view in various works does not justify rejecting the view that Aquinas was a premotionist. He remarks: "we should take it at face value that he espoused an important view in an important work, with no proof that he ever put it aside."<sup>253</sup> Secondly, Oderberg argues that Thomistic premotionism is not based on *De Potentia*. He writes:

[W]e should not think of the remarks in *De Potentia* as involving a mysterious and superfluous ontological add-on to an otherwise perfectly clear account of instrumental causation. Rather, we should see them as a clarification or elaboration of what that causation essentially involves.<sup>254</sup>

Oderberg's point is that Aquinas is not postulating some gratuitous principle (iv); the premotionist thesis is an elaboration of Aquinas' doctrine of causation. He continues:

[H]ow could the axeman apply his axe to cut without giving it a transitory active power, one that is passively received by an object that can otherwise do nothing for itself? What does 'applying the instrument to its proper effect' involve if not that? This is what, when all is said and done, the physical premotionist insists upon.<sup>255</sup>

Oderberg's interpretation effectively deals with Mancha and Suarez' objection that Aquinas does not return to the point with frequency. Aquinas simply takes it for granted that motion requires some transitory active power. Aquinas is not postulating a gratuitous principle; he is avoiding gratuitous explanations of what ought to be self-evident.

In regards to Mancha's assertion about the qualification, Aquinas is merely expounding his view that cognition (within which intelligence resides) is necessary for active power. Mancha's

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<sup>253</sup> Oderberg, 'Premotion', 211.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 212.

reading is somewhat confusing, in truth, since the theory being articulated by Aquinas is no different to what he spelled out in greater detail in *ST*, 1, Q 14.

As such, Aquinas was likely a premotionist, but the doctrine is largely implicit within Aquinas' account of causality. Aquinas simply takes premotionism for granted within his account and does not argue explicitly for it. Another interpretation could be that Aquinas did not realise he was assuming premotion and therefore the absence of further discussion simply reflects that he did not fully grasp the issue. This is possible but it seems a less satisfactory explanation than that he chose not to expound it simply because in a natural reading of Aquinas, the reader would be hard-pressed not to infer premotion.

### III. Critiques of Aquinas' Solution

In this section, a selection of critiques of Aquinas' view will be evaluated, including potential responses from Aquinas. First, I will expound and assess the objections with which Aquinas explicitly dealt in Article 13 of Question 14 of Part 1 of the *Summa*, and in *De Veritate*, before proceeding onto some more contemporary objections.

The first objection anticipated by Aquinas is that if God is necessary, and if whatever is necessary can only produce necessity, it logically follows that God cannot have knowledge of contingent things (since there are no contingent things). In truth, this is not the problem exactly as Aquinas does not state the problem in terms of necessary conditions. The formulation I present here is more of a modernized version of what Aquinas anticipates. This can be illustrated by mathematics since mathematical truths are usually held to be necessary, at least metaphysically so.<sup>256</sup> Since  $1+1=2$  is necessary, it seems to follow that  $2-1=1$  would also be

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<sup>256</sup> On mathematics as metaphysically necessary, see: Hannes Leitgeb, 'Why pure mathematical truths are metaphysically necessary: a set-theoretic explanation', *Syntheses* (2018), 1-8; cf. Juhani Yli-Vakkuri and Joh Hawthorne, 'The Necessity of Mathematics', *Noûs* (2018), 1-28.

necessary. The truth of any mathematical equation does not seem to be contingent on anything in the world. In any possible world we can conceive of,  $1+1=2$ , and it could not be otherwise.

Aquinas' response to this is to say that a necessary cause can have a contingent effect "by reason of the proximate [contingent] cause."<sup>257</sup> To illustrate, Aquinas uses the example of a plant being germinated. Although the behaviour of the sun is necessary (in some sense – Aquinas takes this to be the case), the plant may or may not be germinated. The fact of germination is contingent on the proximate cause: the placement of the seed in soil. Just as the sun is a necessary condition for germination, the effect is not necessary because there is contingency introduced by the planting of the seed. Even if we hold that the sun's behaviour is necessary, it remains possible that the seed might never have been planted, watered, or germinated. In other words, the necessity of the sun does not transfer that necessity where there are proximate contingent causes.

The first point that really ought to be made is that Aquinas' analogy is sloppy because he refers to the sun's behaviour as necessary, which obviously is not the case in logical or metaphysical terms. In nomological terms, Aquinas is no doubt correct. It is unavoidably the case as a matter of physical law that the sun will stimulate a process of photosynthesis, but the objection is stronger than that. However, the claim that a necessary cause can produce contingent effects is not necessarily to be rejected, despite the sloppy analogy. As Peter Wolff argues, a contingent effect is one with an indeterminate cause.<sup>258</sup> This fact is evident from a logical analysis of what it means to be contingent, since a contingent effect (i.e., event) is one that is not determined. If a cause were determinate, it would follow that the effect it produced would be determinate too. However, what if we are to say that God's knowledge is necessary but that He lacks knowledge of indeterminate causes of contingent effects? If that is so, God's knowledge can be necessary,

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<sup>257</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A13.

<sup>258</sup> Peter Wolff, 'Necessary and Contingent Effects', *The Review of Metaphysics* 11:2 (1957), 205.

but an element of contingency is introduced by contingent effects in their proximate causes, since they are indeterminate. In fact, this is the view Aquinas explicitly takes.<sup>259</sup> An objection here may raise the question of how these proximate causes can be contingent if God knows them. Aquinas' retort, then, God knows contingent effects by virtue of His vision of knowledge from eternity. As such, Aquinas is arguing that God's possession of knowledge is had in such a way so as not to render it necessary.

The second objection with which Aquinas contends can be stated as follows:

- (1) If the antecedent of a conditional is necessary, the consequent is also necessary.
- (2) The proposition 'If God knew that this thing will be, it will be' is true.
- (3) The antecedent 'God knew that this thing will be' is necessary.
- (4) Therefore, the consequent 'it will be' is also necessary.
- (5) Therefore, whatever God knows is necessary (viz. it will necessarily obtain).<sup>260</sup>

The argument is logically valid. Aquinas, therefore, must deny a premise. Aquinas initially seems unwilling to attack (1). Aquinas assumes (2). Likewise, Aquinas argues that (3) cannot be rejected. In responding to the suggestion that one can avoid the necessity of 'God knew that this thing will be' by stating it as 'God knew this contingent to be future', Aquinas since such a re-formulation does not erase the necessity "for whatever has had relation to the future, must have had it, although the future sometimes does not follow."<sup>261</sup> The fact that the future sometimes does not follow, Aquinas argues, does not impact upon the modalities at play. It is not possible to avoid the necessity of God's knowledge of the future by specifying that what He knew is

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<sup>259</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A13.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A13.



contingent since the modal relation in the proposition is independent of such semantical hokey-cokey.

Instead, Aquinas argues, the solution lies not in disputes about the location of necessity, but in the soul. He writes:

[T]hat when the antecedent contains anything belonging to an act of the soul, the consequent must not be taken as it is in itself, but as it is in the soul: for the existence of a thing in itself is different from the existence of a thing in the soul [...] [I]f I say, *If God knew anything, it will be*, the consequent must be understood as it is subjected to the divine knowledge, that is, as it is in its presentiality. And thus it is necessary, as also the antecedent: *for everything that is, while it is, must necessarily be*.<sup>262</sup>

In the closing sentence, Aquinas relies heavily on Aristotle.<sup>263</sup> In this passage, Aquinas accepts (3) and (4). It seems that what Aquinas is insisting upon is not a wholesale rejection of (1), but highlighting a distinction within it. The distinction between ‘act of the soul’ and the existence of a thing *ipso facto* requires some unravelling. First, is it equivalent to the distinction “between the manner of speaking or the thing spoken about” in *De Veritate*?<sup>264</sup> In *De Veritate*, Aquinas is drawing the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re*, but this notion of ‘act of the soul’ is difficult to decipher.

Aquinas’ example of “What the soul understands is immaterial” is helpful to elucidating matters.<sup>265</sup> For Aquinas, following Aristotle once more, that activity follows being.<sup>266</sup> It follows from this that if the soul is immaterial, the soul’s acts must be immaterial. This seem just to be Aquinas’ point: that which the soul understands is immaterial because such is an act of the soul,

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, I.

<sup>264</sup> *DV*, Q2, A12.

<sup>265</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A13.

<sup>266</sup> John Peterson, *Introduction to Thomistic Philosophy* (Lanham, 2013), 85ff; and John Peterson, *Aquinas: A New Introduction* (Lanham, 2008), 145.

but it is quite possible that the thing being understood is material. For example, if John is frying a steak, what the soul understands is the immaterial proposition ‘John is frying a steak’, but it is nonetheless the case that John, and indeed his steak, are material. The act of understanding is an immaterial act for the soul, and it is therefore wrong, Aquinas argues, to speak of it as otherwise. One must treat things in the appropriate *mode*. What Aquinas is doing, then, similarly but not entirely identically to the distinction in *De Veritate* is argue that each thing must be understood in the proper mode.

In relation to God’s knowledge, what the argument gets wrong is that it erroneously defines the relevant mode within which matters must be understood. God’s knowledge of the future must be understood not *qua* future, but as divine present. As such, it does not entail that future contingents are in fact necessary in the fatalist’s sense of ‘determined ahead of time’ since God’s knowledge is of the present – and of course present states of affairs are necessary since what *is*, cannot not be. Aquinas’ response, then, is that the claim that the antecedent ‘God knew that this thing will be’ is necessary conflates two distinct notions of necessity. It is true in one sense, but not the other. Consequently, Aquinas fends off the argument by highlighting ambiguity in the premises. The fatalist will have to iron out the ambiguity or counter Aquinas’ distinction of modes to press the argument further.

The third objection with which Aquinas engages in the *Summa* draws on a contrast between divine and creaturely knowledge. What humans know, the objection states, must necessarily be. For example, if John knows that he will attend a conference, it is necessarily the case that the John will attend the conference, for if he does not attend, he would not really have known that he was attending. He would merely have had a *justified belief*, but it must also be true to constitute knowledge.<sup>267</sup> God’s knowledge is far more certain than human knowledge, so if

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<sup>267</sup> Of course, as we noted in the last chapter, Gettier cast doubt on the traditional tripartite definition of knowledge (see: Edmund Gettier, ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’, *Analysis* 23:6 (1963), 121-23), but most

human knowledge entails that the state of affairs necessarily obtains, it must also be the case that the state of affairs of which God has knowledge must necessarily obtain. However, the argument continues, no future contingent thing can necessarily be, so such necessarily being things cannot be known by God.<sup>268</sup> Setting aside the human-divine contrast sub-argument for (6), this argument essentially is a *modus tollens*:

(6) If God knows x (where x is some future contingent), it is necessary that x obtains.

(7) It is not necessary that x obtains

(8) Therefore, God does not know x.

Aquinas' response is to deny (7) in a qualified way. To monotonously return to Aquinas' appeal to God's knowledge *ab aeterno*, Aquinas argues again that once the proper mode is taken into account, the problem evaporates. He writes:

Hence what is known by us must be necessary, even as it is in itself; for what is future contingent in itself, cannot be known by us. Whereas what is known by God must be necessary according to the mode in which they are the subject to the divine knowledge [...] but not absolutely as considered in their own causes.<sup>269</sup>

As Aquinas made clear earlier, the issue with the objection is this notion of 'necessity'. The objector is objecting along temporal lines, as if God has prior knowledge of some event and that such an event must then, at some future point, obtain. This, however, is quite wrong.

Again, Aquinas refers to the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re*. The proposition

'Everything known by God must be necessary' be understood in one of two senses:

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philosophers concur that truth is a necessary condition for knowledge. I will not defend the necessity of the truth condition here, but will assume it.

<sup>268</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A13.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.* Latin: *Et ideo illud quod scitur a nobis, oportet esse necessarium etiam secundum quod in se est, quia ea quae in se sunt contingentia futura, a nobis sciri non possunt. Sed ea quae sunt scita a Deo, oportet esse necessaria secundum modum quo subsunt divinae scientiae, ut dictum est, non autem absolute, secundum quod in propriis causis considerantur.*

(A) Divided, where it refers to the thing: everything known by God is necessary

(B) Composite, where it refers to the statement: “This proposition, ‘that which is known by God is’ is necessary.”<sup>270</sup>

(A) is false, whereas (B) is true in a logical sense. It might be true that is necessary that x obtains, but is does ‘x’ denote the thing known or the proposition? If it refers to the thing, then (6) is to be rejected, says Aquinas, since it is not necessary that x obtains. However, if what (6) expresses is that the proposition ‘x is known by God, and therefore necessarily obtains’ is true, then (6) is true, but of no great consequence insofar as the fatalist’s objection is concerned.

Since God’s knowledge of x is present, it is necessary that x *is*, as all present things are, but that does entail that the thing itself is necessary. For example, in the divine present, it is true that Napoleon is. That does not entail that Napoleon is necessary. His parents, as couples are wont to do, could well have had a vigorous debate over the ontology of abstract objects on the night he was conceived and slept in separate rooms, meaning he was not conceived at all. He is, then, a contingent entity. However, since God cognizes Napoleon in the presentiality of eternity, it follows that Napoleon must be – cannot not be – since what is, cannot but be. As such, there is no contradiction in stating that a contingent being is known necessarily. On this matter, Aquinas and I are, for now, in concurrence.

Thus far, Aquinas has sparred against his objectors with relative ease. We shall proceed then to the objections in *De Veritate* to see if any of the seven objections there can land heavier blows.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

The first objection raised is future contingents lack truth values and, therefore, cannot be determinately true. This argument is a synthesis of strains of two distinct arguments in Aristotle.<sup>271</sup>

(9) x can be known if and only if x is true (where x denotes some future singular contingent).

(10) x is not true (since future singular contingents lack truth values).

(11) Therefore, x cannot be known.

(9) is fairly uncontroversial. As just noted, epistemologists are broadly agreed that truth is a necessary condition for knowledge.<sup>272</sup> Allan Hazlett has cast doubt on the traditional factivity justification for such a condition, but even he nonetheless concedes that if something is known, it must also be true.<sup>273</sup> Aquinas instead attacks (10). It is no error to say x is not true in the temporal mode since x does not have a truth value, but in the eternal mode, x is present, and therefore is known as true. All the argument proves is that conceived in the temporal mode, x cannot be known – but that has no bearing upon Aquinas’ argument whatsoever. As noted earlier, to refute this response, the objector must refute Aquinas’ division of modes by proving the concept is either internally incoherent or inconsistent with Aquinas’ other commitments, such as the notion of divine personhood.

The second objection is more complex and is stated as follows:

That from which the impossible would follow is impossible. But if God knew a singular future contingent, the impossible would follow, namely, that God’s knowledge would be wrong. Hence, it is impossible for Him to know a singular future contingent. Proof of the minor follows. Let us suppose that God knows some singular future contingent

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<sup>271</sup> On this, see: Jaako Hintikka, *Analyses of Aristotle* (New York, 2004), 10ff.

<sup>272</sup> Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa and Matthias Steup, ‘The Analysis of Knowledge’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 07/03/2017, < <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/#TrutCond>>, (accessed: 05/10/2019).

<sup>273</sup> Allan Hazlett, ‘The Myth of Factive Verbs’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80:3 (2010), 497-522.

event, such as that Socrates is sitting. Now, either it is possible that Socrates is not sitting or it is not possible. If it is not possible, then it is impossible for Socrates not to sit.

Hence, for Socrates to sit is necessary, although what was granted was contingent. On the other hand, if it be possible not to sit, and granted he does not, nothing inconsistent follows from this. It would follow, however, that the knowledge of God is erroneous, and hence it would not be impossible for His knowledge to be false.<sup>274</sup>

Aquinas responds to this argument by re-affirming that “a contingent is referred to divine knowledge according to its act of existence in the realm of nature.”<sup>275</sup> The premise that if God knew such a future contingent would entail an impossibility is false. Aquinas’ response to objection nine is also elaborative here since he notes that although a future thing does not yet exist, “as soon as it is present it has both existence and truth, and in this condition stands under the divine vision.”<sup>276</sup> Insofar as objection two is concerned, then, the premises rely on the assumption that God knows future singular contingents qua future, but Aquinas explicitly rejects that view. The future, though non-existent in the world, is existent to God qua present. As before, the objector must show that God cannot know in timeless presentiality.

Objection three takes a slightly different flavour. The argument holds if God knows x, where x is some apparently contingent thing, then insofar as it is in God, it is known as necessary. Once more Aquinas’ stock and barrel response is that it is necessary in the manner all present events are.<sup>277</sup> Once more, the objector has to wrestle with the contrasting modes of existence.

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<sup>274</sup> DV, Q2, A12. Latin: *Praeterea, illud ad quod sequitur impossibile, est impossibile. Sed ad hoc quod Deus sciat singulare contingens et futurum, sequitur impossibile, scilicet quod scientia Dei fallatur. Ergo impossibile est quod sciat singulare futurum contingens. Probatio mediae. Detur quod Deus sciat aliquod futurum contingens singulare, ut Socratem sedere. Aut ergo possibile est Socratem non sedere, aut non est possibile. Si non est possibile; ergo impossibile Socratem non sedere, ergo Socratem sedere est necessarium. Datum autem fuerat quod esset contingens. Si autem sit possibile non sedere, hoc posito non debet sequi aliquod inconveniens. Sequitur autem quod scientia Dei fallatur. Ergo non erit impossibile scientiam Dei falli.*

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

The fourth objection, adopted from Aristotle, is that “when the major of a syllogism expresses necessity and the minor expresses inherence, a conclusion expressing necessity follows. But the following is true: Whatever is known by God must necessarily be. For, if what God knew as existing did not exist, His knowledge would be false. Therefore, if something is known by God to exist, it necessarily exists. But no contingent must necessarily be. Therefore, no contingent is known by God.”<sup>278</sup>

Aquinas’ response here, as in the *Summa*, is to appeal to the *de re* or *de dicto* distinction.

Given we have expounded how this response undermines the objection elsewhere, it will suffice to say presently that when the composite sense is taken and the whole dictum is considered, the objection becomes impotent. If the dictum is divided, the proposition is false. As Craig states, the proposition ‘Whatever is known by God must necessarily be’, understood *de re*, must be false, as can be demonstrated by substituting the proposition with any other. For example, take the proposition ‘Mr Monopoly’s buying of a house’ and substitute it in the place of ‘what is known by God exists’, and it yields ‘Mr Monopoly’s buying of a house must necessarily be’.<sup>279</sup> That deterministic conclusion can be rejected as false. By contrast, the composite sense, ‘Necessarily, Mr Monopoly’s buying a house’ is true since it is a present tense happening and what is, again, cannot but be. Aquinas quickly dispatches objection five, which applies the necessity to the thing itself, with the same rationale.<sup>280</sup>

Objection six, though pre-Cartesian, raises what might be termed an argument from epistemic scepticism. It asserts that necessary truths are more certain than contingent truths. In the temporal mode, this is plausible enough. It is more certain that  $1+1=2$  than it is that that it will not rain tonight. However, the argument proceeds to assert that since God has the most certain

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 111.

<sup>280</sup> *DV*, Q2, A12.

knowledge, He must only know necessary truths.<sup>281</sup> This argument, however, is bizarre – not least because it is not logically valid, far less sound. Even if it true that necessary knowledge is more certain (which, while true for creatures, is not obviously true for God), it does not follow that God could only know necessary truths. God could well have equal certainty of both. What is most surprising is that Aquinas does not even challenge the validity of the argument. Rather, he merely repeats his denial of God’s knowledge of future contingents qua future. While this is a satisfactory solution, the refutation should be stronger.

In the seventh objection, the objector formulates the following argument:

(12) If the antecedent of a conditional is necessary, so too will be the consequent.

(13) The antecedent ‘This is known by God’ in the conditional ‘If something is known by God, it will exist’ is necessary.

(14) Therefore, the consequent ‘it will exist’ is necessary’.

(15) Therefore, everything known by God must necessarily exist.<sup>282</sup>

This argument bears striking similarity to the version consider in the *Summa*. In *De Veritate*, however, Aquinas devotes greater detail to it than any other objection. Aquinas’ move is to argue, as in the *Summa*, “if, in the antecedent, something is signified which pertains to knowledge, the consequent must be taken according to the manner of the knower, not according to the manner of the thing known.”<sup>283</sup> Once the consequent is properly construed, the inference from (14) to (15) collapses. Consider the following example: ‘If God knows Matthew will write an email, Matt will write an email’. In the above argument the conclusion ‘Matthew will write an email is necessary’. However, it does not follow from that that Matthew will necessarily write an email. Why? In the eternal mode, the writing of the email is present. The

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.



writing of the email is necessary insofar as God can see qua present future Matthew writing his email, but it does not logically follow that Matthew was compelled to write the email by some causal or logical necessity. The objection conflates *necessitas consequentiae* with *necessitas consequentis*.

In regard to the eighth objection, Aquinas presents no answer. What his answer *would* be is predictable though. The objection holds that whatever is eternal is necessary, and all that God has known is eternal, which entails that all that God has known is necessary. First, as noted, Aquinas would gladly accept that God's knowledge is necessary, though the objects of his knowledge may be contingent. Second, the objection again conflates modes of being. God's knowledge is eternal in that God's knowledge is properly situated in eternity since it is *in* God, and God possesses such knowledge from eternity as present. However, that does not, *contra* the eighth objection, entail that all that God has known is necessary in any deterministic sense. The theist may find herself tempted to deny the premise that 'whatever is eternal is necessary'. For example, perhaps time is eternal but contingent. On this view, time's existence is contingent upon God but co-extensive with Him. In such a case, time would be eternal but not necessary. Perhaps this notion can be applied to Avicenna's or Al-Farabi's neo-Aristotelian notion of an eternal yet contingent world,<sup>284</sup> or indeed to Descartes' notion of eternal yet created truths.<sup>285</sup> However, this move ought to be resisted because it is incoherent. To say a contingent being can be co-extensive with a necessary being yields absurdity since the necessary being would need to precede, in some sense, the contingent being in order for the contingent

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<sup>284</sup> On the Aristotelian roots of a contingent eternity theory, see: Michael Sylwanowicz, *Contingent Causality and the Foundation of Duns Scotus' Metaphysics* (Leiden, 1996), 30, fn. 28. For Avicenna and Al-Farabi on an eternal yet contingent world, see: Len Evan Goodman, *Avicenna* (London, 1992), 83-96 [*This has a particularly helpful discussion of Al-Ghazali's critique*] and Phillippe Vallat, 'Al-Farabi's Arguments for the Eternity of the World and the Contingency of Natural Phenomena', in: J. Watt and J. Lössl (eds.), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle - The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Aldershot, 2011), 259-86.

<sup>285</sup> Descartes' theory is authoritatively discussed in: E. M. Curley, 'Descartes on the Creation of Eternal Truths', *The Philosophical Review* 93:4 (1984), 569-597; and Harry Frankfurt, 'Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths', *The Philosophical Review* 86:1 (1977), 36-57.

being to be rather than not be. Indeed, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd explicitly make this point that that which has always been and always will be, cannot but be.<sup>286</sup> As such, the theist, if she wishes to maintain divine timelessness, must the inseparability of eternity and necessity. In any case, it is not necessary, as shown above, to deny such inseparability so one can quite readily dispatch the objection without doing so.

Proceeding to objection nine, the objector runs the following argument:

- (16) If x is related to the true, x is related in the same way to existence.
- (17) [If x is not related to existence, it is not related to the true, and vice versa]
- (18) Where X denotes some future contingent, x is not related to existence (since such contingents lack existence).
- (19) Therefore, from (17) and (18), future contingents are not related to the true.
- (20) [If x is not related to the true, there can be knowledge of x].
- (21) Therefore, from (19) and (20), there can be no knowledge of future contingents.<sup>287</sup>

We alluded to Aquinas' response in the analysis of objection two, namely, that he stresses that future contingents are not true to God, so the premises stated here are irrelevant. However, Aquinas goes further and argues that "God, however, also knows the relation of one thing to another, and in this way, He knows that a thing is future in regard to another thing."<sup>288</sup> This further statement is relevant to a more contemporary critique of Aquinas' view from Anthony Kenny. Kenny argues that if Aquinas' account of divine presentiality is correct, absurdity emerges:

[T]he whole concept of a timeless eternity, the whole of which is simultaneous with every part of time, seems to be radically incoherent. For simultaneity as ordinarily

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<sup>286</sup> Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna*, 83ff.

<sup>287</sup> *DV*, Q2, A12.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

understood is a transitive relation. If A happens at the same time as B, and B happens at the same time as C, then A happens at the same time as C. ...But, on St. Thomas' view, my typing of this paper is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Again, on his view, the great fire of Rome is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Therefore, while I type these very words, Nero fiddles heartlessly on.<sup>289</sup>

We shall consider this argument, a similar version of which has also been formulated by Richard Swinburne,<sup>290</sup> in more detail later in our chapter on the coherence of timelessness, but provisionally at least Aquinas offers a solution. On Aquinas' view, Kenny's characterisation is misleading for two reasons. First, Aquinas' account is an account of atemporality. Kenny's talk of A, B, or C happening at some time is inconsistent with this. It is impossible for something to occur at some time when there is no time. Secondly, within God's knowledge is knowledge of the temporal succession of events. The event of Germany's surrender in WWII may be simultaneously present with, say, Socrates' drinking of hemlock in the divine vision, but that does not entail that God does not know that in the temporal mode the latter precedes the former. Returning to objection nine, the objector – like Kenny – is importing temporal presuppositions but to predicate objections on such presumptions will pose no threat to Aquinas' framework.

In objection ten, another Aristotelian objection surfaces, namely, from the premise that “whoever does not understand one determined thing understands nothing.”<sup>291</sup> From this premise, it is argued that if future contingents are not determined, and they are not determined, then there can be no knowledge at all. Just what Aquinas means by this premise is unclear. Moreover, the origin of this claim in Aristotle is difficult to ascertain since Aquinas' paraphrase does not obviously resemble Aristotle's own words, but closest that Aristotle comes to such a

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<sup>289</sup> Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford, 1979), 38-39.

<sup>290</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford, 1977), 220-21.

<sup>291</sup> *DV*, Q2, A12.

view is in *Metaphysics* Γ when discussing the Law of Identity.<sup>292</sup> Certainly, Robert Mulligan S.J. also suggests Aquinas is referring to this passage.<sup>293</sup>

However, if our exegesis is correct, understanding just what the objection is asserting remains enigmatic. The most natural reading of the objection's main premise is that if one does not know that which is determined, one knows nothing. However, that is neither a plausible proposition, nor would it make sense of why Aquinas extracted this principle from a discussion of the Law of Identity. However, following Mulligan's interpretation, perhaps the first premise ought not be read as a direct premise but a logical principle that justifies the second premise. On this view, the argument runs something as follows: to know something, its truth value must be determined (since one can only know that which is true). If something is not determined (either by its causes or by definition as an analytic truth, and this is where Aquinas seems to very loosely want to appeal to the concept of identity in Aristotle), then it cannot be known. Since future contingents are neither determined by their causes nor by definition, it follows that nothing can be known of them. Understood in this way, the argument is valid and the premises appear sound.

In responding, Aquinas again attacks the claim that future contingents are not determined. While they are not causally determined in the temporal mode, they are determined insofar as they are present to God in eternity. The objector assumes that either a future contingent proposition has an undetermined truth value, but that is not necessarily exhaustive. Construed *qua* future, the objector is right. However, since God's knowledge is properly construed in terms of eternal presentiality, the objection fails. As such, Aquinas' move is effective.

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<sup>292</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.1006b

<sup>293</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, volume 1, (Eugene, 2008), 117, fn. 4.

Objection eleven is derived from Hugh of St. Victor, whose theory of divine foreknowledge is perhaps the most understated in shaping Aquinas' own view, in *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*:

Shall we say that in the Creator from eternity all things were uncreated which we created by Him in time, and were known there where they were contained, and were known in the way in which they were contained? Shall we say that God did not know anything from outside Himself who contained all things in Himself? They were not there because they were to be here, nor should the cause of those there be believed to have been from those here.<sup>294</sup>

Aquinas summarises this premise as the claim that God knows nothing outside of Himself. Conjoined with the claim that contingent things are outside of God, it would follow that God cannot know contingent things.<sup>295</sup> Aquinas' refutation is that Hugh is making a category error. It is true that if the word 'outside' is taken to mean the means *by which* God knows. God does not have knowledge by virtue of anything external to Him. However, if outside is construed as *what* God knows, this is false. God can know things external to Him, and this has – Aquinas argues – has been demonstrated in preceding responses. Hugh first deals in the wrong category but even if he deals in the right category, adequate responses have already been given.

Aquinas seems to be correct about the distinction between *by which* and *what*, but he does not seem to adequately resolve a possible objection surrounding the former. Even if Aquinas holds as true the claim that God does not possess His knowledge by means of external things, this raises the problem of human freedom. This was a diagnosis which Luis de Molina, to whom we shall turn, made well. If God's knowledge is in no sense dependent on something external to

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<sup>294</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Hugh of Saint Victor on the Sacraments of the Christian Faith (De Sacramentis)*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Eugene, 2007), 36 (Book 1, Part 2, Question 15).

<sup>295</sup> DV, Q2, A12.

Him, how can there be freedom? For example, if God knows that David will buy a coffee, that knowledge must in some way be contingent on David's actions, for if David were to do otherwise, God's knowledge would be other than it is. Aquinas would likely retort that God's knowledge does not determine since it is present to Him, but that is beside the point. The issue with Aquinas' account is not that it makes God deterministic; it is that God's knowledge does not take seriously enough alternative possibilities. Since freedom is defined by alternative possibilities, the capacity to act otherwise, Aquinas' theory of God's knowledge impedes His freedom. It is very well to say God knows what David will do, and it may be true that that does not determine what David does, but that knowledge is not wholly internal to God in a strict sense since it depends on David's free choice. One possible solution would be to say that David's choice is 'locked in'. By that, I mean that since God knows what David will do qua present, David's buying of the coffee is necessary. If that is so, David could not actually do otherwise, so God's knowledge is not based on David's choice. However, that does not seem to sit easily with genuine freedom. How can David be said to be acting freely if the necessity of His action is locked in from eternity? It would be of no help to say that God knew from eternity that David would freely choose to buy the coffee since that still makes God's knowledge, though antecedent, depend on David. As such, while Hugh's criticism is well-refuted by Aquinas, it can be developed into an objection to which Aquinas has not provided an entirely satisfactory solution.

The final objection in *De Veritate* is that knowledge is stated as follows:

Something contingent cannot be known through a medium that is necessary; for, if the medium is necessary, the conclusion will be necessary. Now, God knows all things

through a medium, His own essence. Hence, since this medium is necessary, it seems that He cannot know anything contingent.<sup>296</sup>

The objection presents a dichotomy between contingent and necessary mediums – and each medium allows knowledge of things only of its own kind. The move one would expect Aquinas to make here to argue that it is improper to speak of God’s essence as a medium. However, he argues that though the essence is a medium, “it is not equated with anything, even though it is a proper medium for singulars.”<sup>297</sup> While Aquinas is undoubtedly right that the essence of the Almighty is incommensurable with anything, the response does not properly address the objection. It is true to say a medium must be either necessary or contingent, for that is just an exhaustive statement of modal possibilities. Aquinas’ response is essentially that God’s essence cannot be categorised, but that is woefully inadequate since the possibilities presented are exhaustive. The issue, as Aquinas well knew, is that either option is unacceptable.

When we consider a contemporary objection along similar lines, the problem becomes more evident. I have granted Aquinas that there is no contradiction in stating that a contingent being being [sic.] known necessarily. However, this position does yield a rather bizarre notion of contingency when pressed. While the divine vision of knowledge seems to preserve contingency since the things are contingent, but God’s knowledge is necessary, Aquinas’ view hinges on the assumption that contingent things can even exist, but is that even possible given his philosophical framework? Consider the following. Why is P rather than  $\sim$ P true?

Presumably, because God ordained such a state of affairs such that P is true rather than not true.

Aquinas seems to present an adequate answer for how a contingent thing can be known necessarily, but there is a further question of whether a thing can be contingent. If God is a

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<sup>296</sup> DV, Q2, A12.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

necessary being who is pure actuality, and Aquinas is of that view, then how can God make decisions? The obvious answer is that God is volitional being, but can a being that is pure actuality be volitional? Aquinas' answer to this objection in *Summa Contra Gentiles* is as follows:

For to whom it belongs to win the end principally, to him it belongs to will the things that are ordered to the end for the sake of the end. Now, God Himself is the ultimate end of things, as appears somewhat from what has been said. Hence, because He wills Himself to be, He likewise wills other things, which are ordered to Him as to the end.<sup>298</sup>

In short, Aquinas' dogma is that God can will other things because He can will Himself (*volendo se, vult etiam alia*). However, this answer is wholly unsatisfactory. As Norman Kretzmann notes, Aquinas' appeal to God's willing of the self does not obviously furnish his account with genuine volitional choice. He writes: "[S]ince God's willing of other things is presented as occurring in his necessary, choiceless willing of himself, there's still no sign of divine choice even in God's willing of other things, the only other kind of divine willing there could be."<sup>299</sup> For Aquinas, God's internal volition, what He will Himself to be, is choiceless. As a necessary being, God cannot be other than He is. God cannot choose to be impotent or malevolent on the classical theistic conception of the divine. Of course, one might choose to adopt the Cartesian position that God can do all things, even the logically impossible, but such a position seems to be untenable.<sup>300</sup> Assuming Aquinas is right about God being unable to choose His *esse*, it ostensibly makes little sense to say that God's choiceless volition of Himself

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<sup>298</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, Chapter 75. All citations are taken from <<https://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles1.htm#75>>.

<sup>299</sup> Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas' Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford, 1997), 219.

<sup>300</sup> As noted, Harry Frankfurt most famously attributed this position to Descartes (see: Harry Frankfurt, 'Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths', *The Philosophical Review* 86:1 (1977), 36-57). This interpretation has been challenged by Richard R. La Croix (see: Richard R. La Croix, 'Descartes on God's Ability to do the Logically Impossible', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 14:3 (1984), 455-75) and E. M. Curley (see: E. M. Curley, 'Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths', *The Philosophical Review* 94:4 (1984), 569-97, esp. 269-76).



enables Him to have choice-based volition of other things. Kretzmann concludes, for all his desire to attribute libertarian freedom to God, the God of Aquinas is fundamentally necessitarian.<sup>301</sup>

It is unclear as to how Aquinas would resolve this matter. It seems logically inescapable that God's decision on what to create, if He is to create at all, involves choiceless volition. God's will that P be true flows necessarily from His nature. If that is so, then no thing is properly contingent, and therefore the contingency so ardently defended by Aquinas is vanquished by his conception of God. This question has been much debated. Leibniz's assertion that God would create the best possible world seems to entail determinism or else a contradiction within the nature of God because God's nature appear to qualify His volition to the point that freedom is erased.<sup>302</sup> though this has been challenged by William Mann in his critique of the 'Best possible world' doctrine.<sup>303</sup> What emerges from this is a God who has no free volition in the sense that He can only do what His nature necessitates. However, what I would retort here is that this is scarcely worrying for God can still choose possibilities within the necessities established by His nature which, as noted in an earlier chapter, preserves His freedom. As such, God is still free to choose, and Kretzmann's objection loses its sting.

Having exhausted the objections with which Aquinas personally engaged, supplemented with some contemporary ones, we can discuss perhaps the most prevalent contemporary criticism of Aquinas' account: namely, that it preserves contingency but not freedom. This argument has been developed by Craig, who accuses Aquinas of "divine determinism."<sup>304</sup> From what has been said, it should be clear that for Aquinas the proposition 'if x is willed by God, x will be' is

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<sup>301</sup> Kretzmann, *Metaphysics of Theism*, 223. My thanks to David Oderberg for noting that Kretzmann never provides a non-question begging reason for this.

<sup>302</sup> Jesse R. Steinberg, 'Leibniz, Creation, and the Best of All Possible Worlds', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 62:3 (2007), 123-33.

<sup>303</sup> William E. Mann, 'The Best of All Possible Worlds', in: Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: the Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, 1991), chapter 10.

<sup>304</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 126.

necessary true, but the consequent 'x will be' can remain contingent since God could have willed otherwise (a point which can, as just argued, be disputed). However, Craig has convincingly argued that Aquinas confuses causal and logical necessity. Take the following example: 'Ellen will visit her grandmother.' On Aquinas' account, this contingent event is causally necessary since it is present to God as a result of being willed by God. As such, if God wills that at t<sub>1</sub> Ellen will visit her grandmother, it becomes causally necessary that Ellen will do. Aquinas has proven that it is not logically necessary, and that preserves contingency in one sense, but that is irrelevant because Ellen is still causally determined.<sup>305</sup> The fatalist's logical objection is overcome but it does not safeguard creaturely freedom.

Aquinas would need to refute Craig's assertion that his account requires causal necessity. The most promising response would be to qualify the Thomistic commitments that Craig criticises. For example, Craig highlights that Aquinas attributes all movements of the will and choice to God as the primary cause. If this causal role is construed more in terms of the premotionist account specified above in which God is not a determining cause, then Craig's argument is undermined, for to say God causes the will would be quite distinct from saying He determines it. However, while it would weaken Craig's critique, it would not, for reasons explored in the Hugh of St. Victor discussion, refute that very obvious tension – even incompatibility – that remains between Aquinas' account and creaturely freedom.

Consequently, Aquinas' account has many virtues and can easily accommodate a great many objections via an appeal to the differing modes of existence or to the composite/divided distinction. As highlighted repeatedly, to undermine Aquinas' account more decisively, one must show the incoherence of his dichotomy between the eternal and temporal modes of being, and this can most promisingly be achieved by repudiating the notion of divine

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 125.

timelessness. Aquinas preserves the logical features of contingency, but those features are necessary, not sufficient, for creaturely freedom. God's foreknowledge, or rather present knowledge of the temporal future, still does not easily cohere with creaturely freedom.

## Chapter 5: The Molinist Account of Providence

This overview expounds Molina's conception of eternity, truth and modality the division of divine knowledge, and the solution to the apparent irreconcilability of free will and God's omniscient predestination. It will also explore the Molinist conception of divine supercomprehension, Molina's concept of freedom, and the idea of general concurrence in Molina's thought.

### I. Molina on Eternity

The standard view of eternity and its relation of time in the sixteenth century was the Boethian or Thomistic view. Alfred Freddoso regards Molina's conception to be an elaboration of the standard view,<sup>306</sup> whereas I will suggest that Molina's own view deviates sufficient to be deemed a view in its own right.

On the standard view, all future contingent entities exist in eternity, even prior to their existence in time. God knows with certainty future contingent states of affairs which have not yet obtained in time because they are present to him in eternity as part of his *scientia visionis* (knowledge of vision). For God, temporality appears to him as tenseless, as a simultaneous whole in eternity. On the standard view, then, time and eternity are conceived of as two distinct planes, though the exact ontological relationship between the two is difficult to articulate. On the standard view, time is metaphysically contingent since it is a corollary to the temporal succession of contingent events. What is meant by this? Garrett Deweese explains: "Since the existence of any physical world is contingent, so too is the existence of physical time."<sup>307</sup> This is because had the physical world not been created, it is possible that time might not exist. Of course, we are

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<sup>306</sup> Alfred Freddoso, 'Introduction', 31ff.

<sup>307</sup> Garrett Deweese, 'Atemporal, Sempiternal, or Omnitemporal: God's Temporal Mode of Being', in: Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (eds.), *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (New York, 2001), 50.

referring to ‘physical time’, as denoted by standard cosmology here, since the standard model rejects metaphysical time as part of its conceptual apparatus. Eternity, by contrast, is metaphysically necessary since God is metaphysically necessary; eternity, crudely put, is the durational metric of God’s existence. However, the fact that time and eternity are metaphysically distinct ought to not be taken to mean they ought to be conceived as separate, since eternity – by necessity – encompasses all temporality. As such, all contingent entities that exist in time also exist in eternity, albeit imperfectly (since God alone can exist perfectly in eternity). This yields the conclusion that all contingent things are present to God even if they are not yet present in time (i.e., future contingents).

Before considering Molina’s point of deviation, let us begin with Molina’s concurrence with the standard view. Molina accepts that God’s experiences all tensed events simultaneously in eternity, and that all temporally future events exist in the eternal present. He writes:

We can [...] easily defend the claim that proposition ‘All the things that exist, have existed, or will exist in any interval of time coexist with God or are present to God with their own actual existence outside their causes’ is true at any time it is uttered vis-à-vis eternity, as long as the copulas ‘coexist’ and ‘are’ consignify not the temporal now at which they are uttered but the now of eternity, where the now of eternity is taken [...] adequately (that is, insofar as it is an infinite duration embracing all of time, the past as well as the future even now apprehended by thought.<sup>308</sup>

Molina also agrees fundamentally with the standard view of the relation between eternity and temporality. His view might be described as somewhat analogous to holism, cast in durational terms. Holism entails the idea, found most prominently in Descartes, that to be present and active in any place, He must simultaneously be present and active in all places

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<sup>308</sup> Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), Disputation 49, §15.

since He is non-divisible. Cast in durational terms, the view is that God is at every point of time. However, He is not in every point *in* time as He exists in eternity.<sup>309</sup> Indeed, Molina uses an analogy with physical place to illustrate his view: just as a non-existent place cannot be co-present with God, a non-existent time cannot be present with God. In like manner, a future time in the temporal mode cannot be properly present with God in eternity.<sup>310</sup> This seems to place him at odds with Aquinas on the specifics of the relation between time and eternity, but he is still subscribing to Aquinas' framework. His most developed statements of his compliance to the standard view feature in Disputation 49, especially §16, which reads:

Eternity is indivisible and infinite, and hence coexist as a whole with the whole of time in such a way as to coexist as a whole with each of its parts and points, it cannot come about that a thing exists in time without also existing in the duration of eternity. Since, I say, all these things are so, it follows that no one should think that the infinite duration of eternity, which embraces all of time, is a simultaneous whole in a sense that implies and renders it true that future things exist in it outside their causes before they are caused to exist in times [...] Rather eternity is a simultaneous whole in the sense that it coexists as a whole with the whole of time and with each part of it, not only when and not before each of those parts exists in itself – not, of course, because of any defect on the side of eternity, but because such a part of time does not yet exist in its own right and absolutely.<sup>311</sup>

As on the standard view, eternity is construed as an indivisible and simultaneous whole, unlike temporality which is divisible into tenses, which encompasses time. However, Molina opts to demarcate two senses of 'simultaneous'. The first, which he suggests Aquinas may have held

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<sup>309</sup> On this theory of holenmerism, see: Edward Slowik, 'Cartesian Holenmerism and Its Discontents: Or, on the "Dislocated" Relationship of Descartes's God to the Material World', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 57:2 (2019), 234-54.

<sup>310</sup> Molina, *Concordia*, Disputation 48, §4.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., Disputation 49, §16.

(though certainly, he does not commit Aquinas to this view), is that eternity is “simultaneous whole in a sense that implies and renders it true that future things exist in it outside their causes before they are caused to exist in times.” For Molina, on this view, nothing exists in the temporal mode unless it exists in the temporal mode but all future things in the temporal mode now exist in the eternal mode. Alfred Freddoso’s discussion of this sense, I believe, has led to some confusion. Freddoso claims this is either a misunderstanding or extrapolation of Aquinas since “it is certainly difficult to imagine that either Boethius or St. Thomas assenting to the claim that merely future things exist in eternity *now* (that is, at the present time), even before they come to exist in time.”<sup>312</sup> However, from Freddoso’s own synopsis of Aquinas’ position, it does seem that Aquinas would assent to that. After all, Aquinas is committed to the view that all contingent entities in time have a corresponding – albeit inadequate – existence in eternity (that is not to say that they have two modes of existence; it is to say they have the same existence across two durations). If this was indeed Aquinas’ view of the simultaneity within the vision of knowledge, then Molina certainly deviated from Aquinas in this regard.<sup>313</sup> Molina himself contributes to this confusion since he eschews Aquinas’ semantic strictness about God’s eternal knowledge of the future. Recall from the previous chapter that Aquinas holds that technically God has no *fore*-knowledge. God knows the temporal future via the eternal present. By contrast, Molina is happier to speak of the future within eternity on the condition that it is understood that he is speaking loosely. Whatever the case, Molina explicitly preferred to take ‘simultaneous’ in its second sense “that it coexists as a whole with the whole of time and with each part of it, not only when and not before each of those parts exists in itself.”<sup>314</sup> What Molina is attempting to clarify here is that a temporally future time cannot be present to God *now* (temporally-speaking) since it does not yet exist, but it can be present to God in the *now* of

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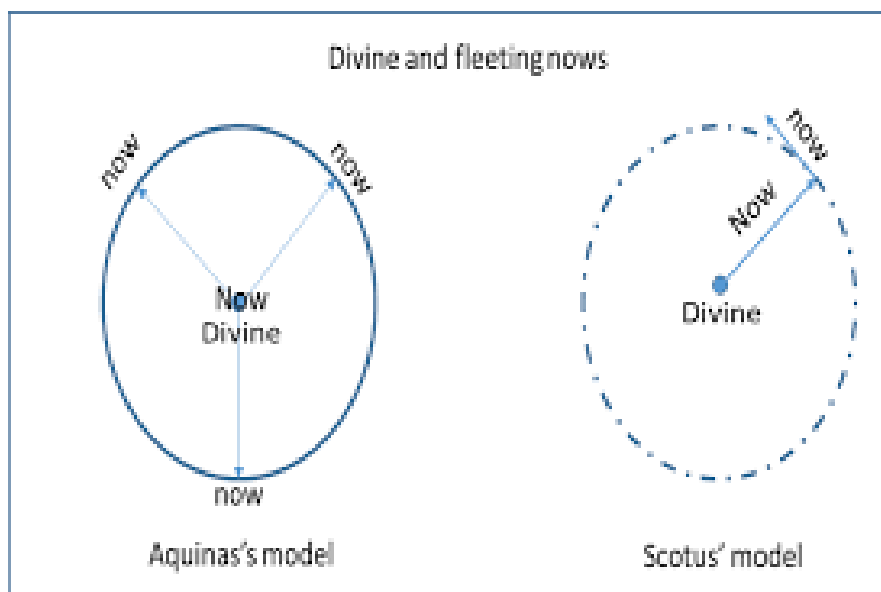
<sup>312</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 33.

<sup>313</sup> It seems that either reading of Aquinas’ view here is plausible as Aquinas’ analysis of it is enigmatic at best. My preferred interpretation is clear in the preceding chapter.

<sup>314</sup> *Op Cit.*

eternity. His rationale for this is merely that co-presence is dyadic. To be co-present with x, x must exist – so if the future does not yet exist, God cannot be co-present with it. The distinction then is that Aquinas might be of the view that future contingents exist in eternity *now* (temporally-speaking), even though they do not yet exist, and Molinists takes the view that they do not exist in eternity *now* (temporally-speaking); they only exist adequately in eternity *now* (eternally-speaking). This is true only once they exist now, for Molina. By contrast, for Aquinas they exist in the eternal present even before they exist in the temporal present.

Molina clarifies his view with an illustration borrowed from John Duns Scotus, provided in Disputation 49, §18.<sup>315</sup> Suppose there is a dot and a circle around it. The dot is said to resemble indivisible eternity and the surrounding circle represents time. In such an illustration, the whole of eternity corresponds to the whole of time. Suppose, however, the circle is only partially drawn, what does the dot correspond to? The answer, Molina argues, is only that part of the circle already drawn. Correspondingly, the indivisible eternity only corresponds to time that has already elapsed.



<sup>315</sup> David Oderberg suggests that this example may have its origin in Boethius. I am unsure of its pedigree but Scotus is the earliest source as far as I am aware.



This all raises the question: does Molina deny the very idea of the knowledge of vision, the idea that God sees everything as a simultaneous whole and so derives foreknowledge? No, Molina explains:

God's knowledge of things that are still contingently future in time does not, properly speaking, have the character of a knowledge of *vision* until those things actually exist in time; rather in the meantime it has the character of a knowledge of *simple intelligence*, because the things that are its objects do not yet exist. But since the proper duration of that knowledge is eternity, and because in eternity, since it co-exists with future time, those things will in the end be present, God's knowledge may be simply called a knowledge of vision in relation to all the things that will exist in any interval of time; and in keeping with the common opinion of the Doctors, we will occasionally refer to it as such.<sup>316</sup>

To be clear, then, Molina agrees that God knows the future from eternity, but the way He knows it is not strictly via a knowledge of vision, though that is a helpful shorthand. However, the most striking issue here is Molina's claim that "the proper duration of that knowledge is eternity, and because in eternity, since it co-exists with future time, those things will in the end be present." After all, Molina has already denied that eternity can correspond to the temporal future since it does not exist. Molina seems to have contradicted himself at first sight. However, this need not be so. As I understand him, this appeal to simple intelligence provides the key to his solution.

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<sup>316</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, Disputation 49, §20.

God does not strictly have knowledge of future contingents in eternity because they have not yet obtained truth-values in time. However, He has *scientia simplicis intelligentiae* by which He knows all possibles. It is because God has this knowledge of possibles that He can have foreknowledge without the corresponding state of affairs actually obtaining. In that, while Molina defends Aquinas' idea that all contingent things are present in eternity to God, he eviscerates Aquinas' notion that this presence is how God comes to have foreknowledge. For Molina, simple intelligence, not the divine vision, is what allows God to carry epistemic relations between time and eternity. He writes that Aquinas' solution "contributes nothing [...] either toward establishing the certitude of the divine foreknowledge concerning future contingents or toward reconciling the contingency of things with divine foreknowledge."<sup>317</sup> The reason for this is that there are no future contingents for God to see with a divine vision for Molina. For that reason, Freddoso's claim that Molina is merely refining Aquinas is wrong. There is commonality but ultimately Molina found the *Doctor Angelicus'* approach to eternity and foreknowledge to be entirely unsuccessful.

That said, the fact that Molina and Aquinas share a conceptual framework leaves abundant space for bridging that divide, especially since they shared similar views on providential action. William J. Abraham succinctly describes Molina's view of God's action in the world:

[God] concurs aptly with everything that happens within the universe, whether that be the action of physical, animate, or human agents. Hence God is involved in all their causal activity. It is rare to find reference to this crucial notion of concurrence in more recent works which generally prefer to speak of divine creation and sustaining the universe.

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<sup>317</sup> As quoted at William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents From Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden, 1988), 171.

Speaking generally, Molina operates with a deep vision of divine involvement in everything that happens.<sup>318</sup>

Subsequently, it becomes clear that Molina and Aquinas both shared a deep commitment to concurrentism that stemmed from their shared commitment to the Boethian conception of eternity. After all, it is precisely because God operates from eternity that He is able to be active across all of the temporal series to the extent that it exists.

## II. Truth and Modality

To understand Molina, it is necessary to provide some cursory remarks on his philosophical framework. Luis de Molina's understanding of the truth of future contingents – both absolute and conditional – is somewhat muddled. William Lane Craig somewhat understates the point when he refers to it as “an important interpretative difficulty.”<sup>319</sup> Molina's writings often refer to contingent things being determinately true, but it is unclear just what he meant by that. The best analysis of what Molina meant is perhaps from Craig, who traces his view to his commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. In that text, Molina interprets Aristotle's view to be that future contingents lack a determinate truth value, as opposed to having an indeterminate or no truth value. In accepting this interpretation of Aristotle, it seems that by ‘determinately true’, Molina has in mind the idea that the truth, not necessity, of future contingents is to be denied. As such, when Molina argues that future contingents cannot in fact be determinately true or false, he is not denying their truth-aptness. He is, rather, arguing that they are neither logically, causally, or temporally necessary. For Molina, to say future contingent propositions cannot be determinate is just to say they must be contingent in every sense. In that, he treats propositions as bivalent.<sup>320</sup> What is meant here is that an indeterminate truth value is not to be taken to imply a rejection

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<sup>318</sup> William J. Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action: Soundings in the Christian Tradition*, II, (Oxford, 2017), 201.

<sup>319</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 193.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-98.

of bivalence, rather, it just conveys a proposition that currently has no necessary truth value, but which is apt to receive determinate truth value some at some future point in time.

The modalities at the heart of Molina's discussion of determinate truth pervades his work.

Alfred Freddoso has identified three different modalities in Molina's thought:<sup>321</sup>

- (1) **Metaphysical Modality** – for Molina, metaphysical modality is central to his natural knowledge, which we will discuss shortly. God's natural knowledge encompasses all metaphysically necessary and contingent states of affairs that could obtain.<sup>322</sup>

Metaphysical modality for Molina is essentially the modalities concerned with understand some thing's nature.<sup>323</sup>

- (2) **Temporal or Accidental Modality** – this modality relates to a kind of necessity or contingency based on how events unfold in the course of time.<sup>324</sup>

- (3) **Causal Modality** – fundamentally, Molina subscribed the Aristotelian notion of causal modalities involving the interactions of substances and the actualisation of various potentialities. When it comes to free will, this is the type of modality with which Molina tends to concern himself,

Moreover, just as Molina's account depends on different types of modalities, he also employs the distinction between *conditional* and *absolute* contingencies. The latter concerns itself with what will happen in an unqualified way whereas the former provides conditions for a certain state of affairs obtaining.

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<sup>321</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 10ff.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., Disputation 50, §6.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., Disputation 47, §2.

<sup>324</sup> For a good overview of type of modality, which Freddoso has since ceased to defend, see: Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism', *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), 257-83.

### III. The Division of Divine Knowledge

As noted, Molina's crowning theological achievement was his articulation of the doctrine of *scientia media*, that is, middle knowledge. Molina himself discarded any pretence of modesty about his thesis, writing that the fact this theory makes prescience, predestination, providence, and the doctrine "cohere so easily and perspicuously with freedom of choice on the basis of middle knowledge is a manifest sign that we have propounded a complete and legitimate way of reconciling all of them."<sup>325</sup> While middle knowledge was Molina's greatest innovation, the idea is effectively developed from Scotus' theory of divine ideas, as was the tripartite division of knowledge that Molina subscribed to. Molina argued that God's knowledge could be ordered conceptually, not temporally, as follows:

(1) Natural Knowledge

(2) Middle Knowledge

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Divine Act of Creation  
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(3) Free Knowledge

In what follows I will provide a brief sketch of what each form of knowledge entailed:

Natural knowledge, as per most medieval theologians, is God's knowledge of all necessary truths and states of affairs.<sup>326</sup> It is prevolitional and since it is necessary, God has the exact same natural knowledge in every possible world. For example,  $1+1=2$  is true regardless of which of an infinite number of possible worlds is in fact instantiated. Likewise, God knows via His

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<sup>325</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 206.

<sup>326</sup> On natural knowledge in medieval theology, a short but helpful discussion is found in: John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy* (London, 1998), 298.

natural knowledge such things as ‘it is metaphysically possible that Justice Scalia will dissent in *Morrison v. Olson*’. How can this be natural if Scalia’s existence is contingent? Because this knowledge is only dealing with possibilities. However, by virtue of His natural knowledge alone, God cannot know whether Justice Scalia actually would dissent. As Molina explains:

Through this type of [natural] knowledge He knew all the things to which the divine power extended either immediately or by the mediation of secondary causes, including not only the natures of individuals and the necessary states of affairs composed of them but also the contingent states of affairs – through this knowledge He knew [...] not that the latter were or were not going to obtain determinately, but rather that they were indifferently able to obtain and able not to obtain, a feature that belongs to them necessarily and this also falls under God’s natural knowledge.<sup>327</sup>

This clarifies that natural knowledge encompasses all metaphysically necessary states of affairs and truths, but it is not strong enough to entail knowledge of actual contingent states of affairs. It only allows for metaphysical possibility when it comes to contingency. It is worth noting too that the metaphysical modality considered in relation to natural knowledge was of great importance to Molina, since he believed that comprehending a thing involved understanding its modalities. Understand the mode, understand the man. As such, a further part of natural knowledge is that it includes God’s ability to comprehend the nature of things.

Secondly, middle knowledge, like natural knowledge, is prevolitional and therefore it is knowledge that God could not cease to have. Molina defines middle knowledge as the type of knowledge which “in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it placed in this or that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things.”<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, Disputation 52, §9.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, Disputation 52, §9.

In less convoluted terms, it is God's knowledge of conditional or subjunctive contingents, including His knowledge of what any given creature would freely do if placed in any given circumstance. For example, it would include such knowledge as 'if Penny Mordaunt were offered the job, she would become Secretary of State for International Development'. To be clear, this knowledge does not entail that she will, in fact, have such a role; it only entails that if she were offered the job, she would take it. It is via His middle knowledge that God surveys all possible worlds to identify which of those worlds He will instantiate. This leads us also to Molina's concept of 'supercomprehension', though that is not his term. Rather, the term comes from later Molinists. Recall that natural knowledge includes God's ability to comprehend entities. It allows God to know, for instance, that Ludwig Wittgenstein could study under Bertrand Russell or not – both are metaphysically possible. It does not entail God's knowledge to comprehend Wittgenstein more substantially by knowing what he would do given this circumstance or that – and that is something God really ought to know. Molina posits then that God's ability to know subjunctive conditionals, via His middle knowledge, provides him with a kind of supercomprehension, a unique capacity to infallibly understand all contingent entities.<sup>329</sup>

At a recent conference, Kirk MacGregor helpfully defined it as follows: "God's unlimited intellectual capacity to perceive infinitely, within his own mind, the individual idea or pattern for every possible thing he could create."<sup>330</sup> The phrase 'supercomprehension' arose in response to criticism that Molina's account of divine comprehension was under-developed and inadequate for justifying God's free knowledge. It is an attempt to explain *how* God knows what He knows. For instance, Jack Davidson argued that Molina's appeal to the depth of God's intellect was vacuous.<sup>331</sup> The purpose of the 'super-' development adds an extra dimension to

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<sup>329</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, Disputation 52, §17.

<sup>330</sup> Kirk MacGregor, 'In Defense of Molina's Doctrine of Supercomprehension', Evangelical Philosophical Society conference, 2018.

<sup>331</sup> Jack Davidson, 'Untying the Knot: Leibniz on God's Knowledge of Future Contingents', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 13 (1996), 89–116; cf. Michael V. Griffin, *Leibniz, God, and Necessity* (Cambridge, 2013), 135.

comprehension, allowing God perfection in His cognition, by explaining how He makes decisions.

In the literature, it is sometimes objected that supercomprehension must undermine human free will since it removes God's freedom. An unfree God cannot create free creatures. The idea here is that if God can supercomprehend Himself, then He cannot be free because His freedom would be transcended by His intellect. However, as both John Laing and Kirk McGregor note, this objection makes no sense since God's self-knowledge of His will cannot be pre-volitional.<sup>332</sup> In effect, the objection amounts to a complaint that God does not know His will before He knows His will.<sup>333</sup>

Logically posterior to middle knowledge is the act of divine will, that is, the creation event. God actualises the possible world of His choosing, a process which has been articulated more formally by both Freddoso and Thomas Flint.<sup>334</sup> Once God has instantiated a particular world, God 'acquires' free knowledge. By 'acquires', I do not mean to suggest that God gains new knowledge from the newly created world. Molina explicitly rules that out. Rather, what is meant that God comes to have knowledge of the truth status of actual propositions and states of affairs pertaining to the world He has created as a logical consequence of the conjunction of His creative act and prevolitional knowledge. Molina describes free knowledge as that which "*after the free act of His will, God knew absolutely and determinately, without any condition or hypothesis, which ones from among all the contingent states of affairs were in fact going to obtain*".<sup>335</sup> Since God has middle knowledge, He knows every conditional the consequent of which would obtain if He actualised possible world w. As such, when He actualised w, it follows

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<sup>332</sup> Kirk R. MacGregor, *Molinist Philosophical and Theological Ventures* (Eugene, 2022), 53ff.

<sup>333</sup> John D. Laing, 'Molinism and Supercomprehension: Grounding Counterfactual Truth', PhD Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2000), 305.

<sup>334</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 47-51; and Thomas Flint, 'The Problem of Divine Freedom', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20:3 (1983), 255-64.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., Disputation 52, §9.



that every consequent – that is, every contingent state of affairs – is known to God as His free knowledge.

#### IV. The Molinist Reconciliation

Thus far we have only explored Molina's tool kit for his attempt to respond to the problem of theological fatalism. Now we may proceed to more clearly articulate just what the solution is. It would be prudent first to quickly illustrate the apparent conflict between providence and human freedom.

Suppose there's a man called Peter. Peter happens to be a first century Jew who has come to accompany an itinerant preacher by the name of Jesus of Nazareth. One day, this Jesus' preaching result in Him being put to trial by the Sanhedrin. Out of fear that he will be persecuted for his affiliation with the Nazarene, Peter denies that he knows Jesus thrice. The question then is: was that Peter's free choice? The Biblical answer is affirmative; Peter is morally culpable for his actions, which implies a free choice – and yet prior to the ordeal, Jesus told Peter that the triple denial would occur. This prediction from Jesus, who is infallible, would suggest that Peter's actions were predestined or inevitable. Which is true: the free will or the predestination? If the former, how could it be certain that Peter would in fact deny Christ? If the latter, how could Peter do any thing other than deny Jesus? If Jesus is infallible, His claim that the proposition 'Peter will deny me three times' must hold true. There seems here to be a contradiction between the predestination and the free will of Peter.

Molina claims that this does not follow on his perspective because it can be conceptualised in the following way:

- (1) God has natural knowledge that it is metaphysically possible for Peter to deny or not to deny Christ.

- (2) God has middle knowledge that states that in possible world  $w_i$  Peter would freely choose to deny Christ thrice.
- (3) God actualises  $w_i$ .
- (4) Since  $w_i$  has now been actualised, it will come to pass that Peter freely chooses to deny Christ.

Since the world that God actualises is the world in which Peter freely does what God intends for him to do, both Peter's free choice and divine providence are at play. The two are rendered compatible. This might raise the concern that Peter's free choice in some sense determines God's action, but Molina rejects this claim. While Molina is committed to a fairly libertarian theory of the will, he also subscribes to a simultaneous divine concurrence according to which He neutrally concurs in each and every secondary cause. He acts simultaneously with secondary causes, thereby making Him causally efficacious in each and every effect in all of creation without contravening that secondary cause's agency, if it has agency. His analogy of two men rowing a boat illustrates this. God and man are the two rowers, working together, towards salvation – the two in harmony, not deterministically.<sup>336</sup> For Molina, the doctrine of simultaneous concurrence, in conjunction with *Scientia media*, allows for an account of providence which is consistent with a libertarian conception of freedom.<sup>337</sup>

## V: Concluding Remarks

Luis de Molina's conception of God's providence and knowledge was a remarkable departure from many of the sixteenth-century notions that stressed divine determinism. Molina, through carefully negotiating a balance of concurrence and dissent with the medieval scholastics (particularly Aquinas and Scotus), reinvigorated a libertarian conception of the human will by

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<sup>336</sup> *Concordia*, Disputation 25.

<sup>337</sup> Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 201.

attempting to illustrate how it can co-exist with a strong view of providence. His work would sway both Catholics, through Francisco Suarez, and Protestants, through Jacobus Arminius.<sup>338</sup> Ironically given that Molinism was born as a polemical attempt to repudiate Protestants, Molina's doctrine is now the most popular response to the problem of theological fatalism among Protestant philosophers of religion today. Whether Molinism is as successful as Molina suggested is yet to be seen, but it is to date one of the credible treatments of the divine cognition.

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<sup>338</sup> The influence on Arminius has been documented by E. Dekker. See: Eef Dekker, 'Was Arminius a Molinist?' *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27:2 (1996), 337-52.

## Chapter 6: Against Nelson Pike - a Defence of Divine Timelessness

### Introductory Remarks

In 1965, the late Nelson Pike (1930 – 2010) published a landmark article entitled ‘Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action’. Five years later, he published his *God and Timelessness*. This brace of scholarly works on God’s knowledge cemented his reputation as one of the fiercest advocates of theological fatalism (though Pike was not strictly a fatalist in my view since he does not purport that his argument is an iron-clad defeater for divine foreknowledge). Pike proposed a fatalist argument but proceeded to argue that his theological fatalist dilemma could be resolved in at least two ways: (i) the positing of a distinction between ‘essential’ and what I term ‘accidental’ omniscience; or (ii) appealing to the doctrine of divine timelessness, such as has – until the twentieth century – dominated the Christian tradition since, at least, the publication of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in c.524.<sup>339</sup> Pike rejects (ii), thereby eliminating one route of resolving the theological fatalist dilemma. In this chapter, I examine the reasons that Pike rejects (ii) and argue that his rationale is flawed. Consequently, assuming Pike was correct that the success of either (i) or (ii) would overcome theological fatalism, I argue that Pike ought to have rejected his own fatalist argument on the basis of (ii). Whether (i) is a plausible solution to the theological fatalist dilemma, and the plausibility of other solutions to the problem,<sup>340</sup> is of no concern in this paper.

### I. The Theological Fatalist Dilemma

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<sup>339</sup> Augustine also discusses the timeless view but his treatment is far more indecisive than that of Boethius.

<sup>340</sup> As a side remark, most formulations of theological fatalism can be readily dismissed for relying on an invalid inference, rooted in Aristotle, from  $\Box (P \supset Q)$  to  $P \supset \Box Q$ . As Donald Williams remarked, this conflation of *necessitas consequentiae* and *necessitas consequentis* is “so swaggering invalid that the student can hardly believe that he [Aristotle] meant it.” (Donald C. Williams, ‘The Sea Fight Tomorrow’, in: Donald C. Williams, *The Elements and Patterns of Being: Essays in Metaphysics*, ed. A. R. J. Fisher (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018), 147. For greater detail on this point, see also: Susan Haack, *Deviant Logic, Fuzzy Logic: Beyond the Formalism* (Chicago, 1996), 73-90 [chapter. 4].

As noted in chapter 1, there are three main forms of fatalism: logical, causal, and theological. Although, as Linda Zagzebski has noted, these forms share a fundamental unity in that they all depend on the same assumption,<sup>341</sup> we shall concern ourselves here exclusively with the lattermost form of fatalism. For the sake of argument, we shall take Pike on his own terms and accept his assertion that his argument is neither reducible to logical fatalism nor contingent upon any causal relation between antecedents and consequents.<sup>342</sup> I will reproduce the argument here to refresh our memories from chapter 1.

Although it is difficult to disagree with William Lane Craig's assertion that "Nelson Pike's development of theological fatalism is a mare's nest of confusion",<sup>343</sup> Pike does kindly furnish us with a standard form of the theological fatalism, which he develops from what he takes to be six assumptions relied upon by Boethius. The argument is as follows:<sup>344</sup>

- (12) 'Yahweh is omniscient and Yahweh exists at T1' entails that 'If Jones does A at T2, then Yahweh believes at T1 that Jones does A at T2'.
- (13) If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient, then 'Yahweh believes P' entails P.
- (14) It is not within one's power at a given time so to act that both 'P' and 'not-P' are true.

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<sup>341</sup> Linda Zagzebski, 'Eternity and Fatalism', in: Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (eds.), *God, Eternity, and Time* (Farnham, 2011), 65.

<sup>342</sup> Of course, both of these contentions are open to scrutiny. For example, Susan Haack has argued that theological fatalism is reducible to logical fatalism (see: Susan Haack, 'On a Theological Argument for Fatalism', *Philosophical Quarterly* 24:95 (1974), 156-59; and Susan Haack, 'On "On Theological Fatalism Again" Again', *Philosophical Quarterly* 25:99 (1975), 159-61), as has William Lane Craig (William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Leiden, 1991), 27-32, especially 28-29). However, this paper is exclusively concerned with refuting Pike on his own terms, not raising new objections to his fatalist argument.

<sup>343</sup> Craig, *Foreknowledge*, 165.

<sup>344</sup> Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (London, 1970), 59-60. I have here omitted Pike's bracketed references to Boethius' assumptions (which, he notes, Boethius himself was not committed to and in some cases explicitly rejects). Pike prefers to use the term 'Yahweh', Wilhelm Gesenius' reconstruction of the pronunciation of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton (יהוה), to denote 'God'.

- (15) It is not within one's power at a given time so to act that something believed by an individual at a time prior to the given time was not believed by that individual at the prior time.
- (16) It is not within one's power at a given time so to act that an individual existing at a time prior to the given time did not exist at the prior time.
- (17) If Yahweh believes at T1 that Jones does A at T2, then if it is within Jones's power at T2 to refrain from doing A then either: (1) It was within Jones's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh believed P at T1 and 'P' is false; or (2) it was within Jones's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh did not believe as He did believe at T2; or (3) it was within Jones's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh did not exist at T1.
- (18) If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient, then the first alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from lines 2 and 3). [Read 'lines' as 'premise']
- (19) The second alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from line 4).
- (20) The third alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from line 5).
- (21) Therefore: If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient and believes at T1 that Jones does A at T1, then it was not within Jones's power at T2 to refrain from doing A (from lines 6 and 7-9).
- (22) Therefore: If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient and exists at T1, then if Jones does A at T2, it was not within Jones's power to refrain from doing A (from lines 10 and 1).

From this, Pike remarks: "If God exists (i.e., if some individual bears the title 'God'), no human is voluntary."<sup>345</sup> The argument, then, is predicated on the idea that if God infallibly knows what circumstance C will obtain at some future time  $T_1$ , then C must obtain at  $T_1$  because if it were not to obtain, God would be wrong, which is impossible if He is infallible. In

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 61.

the words of the late Doris Day’s iconic 1956 single ‘Que Será Será’, whatever will be, will be. In what follows, I do not wish to assess the merits of this fatalist argument. This is firstly because Pike himself does not commit himself to the argument, noting that “[i]t would be a mistake to think that commitment to determinism is an unavoidable implication of the Christian concept of divine omniscience.”<sup>346</sup> Although Liran Shia Gordon has declared that theological fatalism “belongs to the hall of unsolvable philosophical riddles”,<sup>347</sup> Pike does not regard the problem as unsolvable. On the contrary, Pike argues, “a rather wide range of alternatives [are] open to the theologian” in solving the dilemma.<sup>348</sup>

In his critique of Pike, Craig highlights that two solutions Pike particularly concerns himself with is (a) either the denial of *essential* omniscience (that is, the idea that God is omniscient necessarily, by virtue of His essence, rather than merely coincidental so); and (b) the postulation of divine timelessness. Craig explains:

Pike’s conclusion would thus appear to be that fatalism is entailed by the foreknowledge of a temporal, essential God and that the best escape from this is [...] in either ascribing timelessness to God or in denying His essential, as opposed to actual, omniscience. Since Pike objects to divine timelessness on other grounds, we may presume that he prefers the second option.<sup>349</sup>

While Pike does not rule out other moves, these two seem to be his primary focus. The first, the denial of God’s essential omniscience, undermines premises (1), (2), and (7). According to a traditional concept of God, one particularly associated with Augustine and Anselm, God’s relation to omniscience is one of identity. For God to possess omniscience, one must say *He is*

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<sup>346</sup> Nelson Pike, ‘Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action’, *The Philosophical Review* 74:1 (1965), 46.

<sup>347</sup> Liran Shia Gordon, ‘On the Co-nowness of Time and Eternity: a Scotist Perspective’, *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 7:1-2 (2016), 30.

<sup>348</sup> Pike, ‘Divine Omniscience’, 46.

<sup>349</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 26.

omniscient *quoniam quod habet hoc est* (for it is what it has).<sup>350</sup> According to Pike, this *essential* omniscience precludes the introduction of contingency required to undermine the theological fatalist dilemma. By contrast, a God that is merely accidentally or actually omniscient could avoid the dilemma because there is, Pike argues, a distinction between truth and belief that varies depending on if God is merely actually or essentially omniscient. If God is merely actually omniscient, truth is only factually connected to some belief, thereby leaving the possibility for some power to render that belief false. However, if God is essentially omniscient, then truth is analytically connected with God's belief, so there can be no creaturely power that allows for the possibility of rendering that belief false.<sup>351</sup>

By contrast, the timelessness approach attempts to resolve the dilemma by denying the temporal premises, such as (6). Pike's argument against the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom is contingent upon God operating *within* time. Thus, if one appeals to divine timelessness, one refutes the assumption that God is *within* time and the argument collapses. It is worth noting that, as virtually every defender of timelessness has recognized, this solution technically denies *fore*-knowledge since God has no future tense to look toward (since there is no time), but nonetheless it allows God to have knowledge of future contingent propositions and to have that knowledge in a way that is consistent with creaturely freedom.

However, I do not wish to consider whether Pike's appeal to essential omniscience is an adequate solution. In fact, I do not even wish to assess whether an appeal to divine timelessness is an adequate solution. Rather, I intend exclusively to examine the "other grounds" on which Pike objects to divine timelessness. Granting Pike's assumption that timelessness resolves the issue, I intend to show that Pike's reservations about the doctrine are misplaced, thereby

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<sup>350</sup> Lewis Ayres and Michel R. Barnes, 'God', in: Allan D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, 1999), 389.

<sup>351</sup> Pike, 'Divine Omniscience', 43-45.



highlighting that Pike ought to have viewed the appeal to timelessness not merely as a potential but problematic solution to theological fatalism, but rather as a plausible one.

## II. Defining Holochronically Timeless Being (HTB)

Before addressing Pike's objections to timelessness, we had better do ourselves a favour and define what we mean by 'timelessness'. The notion of timelessness that Pike objects to is that of Augustine and Boethius, the idea of the *inteminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta*. To recap: Boethius' most explicit account of divine timelessness is as follows:

Eternity is the whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life. The meaning of this can be made clearer by comparison with temporal things. For whatever lives in time lives in the present, proceeding from past to future, and nothing is so constituted in time that it can embrace the whole span of its life at once. It has not yet arrived at tomorrow, and it has already lost yesterday; even the life of this day is lived only in each moving, passing moment. Therefore, whatever is subject to the condition of time, even that which [...] has no beginning and will have no end in a life coextensive with the infinity of time, is such that it cannot rightly be thought eternal. For it does not comprehend and include the whole of infinite life all at once, since it does not embrace the future which is yet to come. Therefore, only that which comprehends and possesses the whole plenitude of endless life together; from which no future thing nor any past thing is absent, can justly be called eternal.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. Douglas C. Langston (New York, 2010), 89-90 (Book 5, Prose 6).

This equivocation of God's timelessness with His eternity is found also in Augustine:

They [humans] attempt to taste eternity when their heart is still flitting about in the realm where things change and have a past and future; it is still 'vain' (Ps. 5:10). Who can lay hold on the heart and give it fixity, so that for some little moment it may be stable, and for a fraction of time may grasp the splendour of a constant eternity? Then it may compare eternity with temporal successiveness which never has any constancy, and will see that there is no comparison possible. It will see that a long time is long only because it is constituted of many successive movements which cannot be simultaneously extended. In the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present. But no time is wholly present.<sup>353</sup>

Further, similar conceptualisations of God's timelessness are found in the writings of other medieval and early modern theological giants. Anselm declares:

Thou wast not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be to-morrow; but yesterday and to-day and to-morrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday nor to-day nor to-morrow thou art; but simply, thou art, outside all time. For yesterday and to-day and to-morrow have no existence, except in time; but thou, although nothing exists without thee, nevertheless dost not exist in space or time, but all things exist in thee. For nothing contains thee, but thou containest all.<sup>354</sup>

Aquinas concurs:

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<sup>353</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), 228 (Book XI, xi, 13).

<sup>354</sup> Saint Anselm, *Proslogium; Monologium; an Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Guaiulon; and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (Chicago, 1939), 25 (Chapter XIX).

For though some of them may not be in act now, still they were, or they will be; and God is said to know all these with the knowledge of vision: for since God's act of understanding, which is His being, is measured by eternity; and since eternity is without succession, comprehending all time, the present glance of God extends over all time, and to all things which exist in any time, as to objects present to Him. But there are other things in God's power, or the creature's, which nevertheless are not, nor will be, nor were; and as regards these He is said to have knowledge, not of vision, but of simple intelligence.<sup>355</sup>

Calvin echoed the sentiment:

[A]ll things have been and perpetually remain before his [God] eyes, so that to his knowledge nothing is future or past, but all things are present; and present in such a manner, that [...] he holds them and sees them as if (*tanquam*) actually placed before him.<sup>356</sup>

Molina, an opponent of Calvin, expressed a similar view:

[E]ternity is in itself a certain indivisible duration, a simultaneous whole having as a unit an infinite durational latitude by virtue of which it coexist and corresponds as a whole with the whole and as a whole with each interval and point of time.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Thomas Aquinas, 'Summa Theologiae: Part I, Question 14, Article 9', <<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1014.htm>>, accessed: 04/06/2019.

<sup>356</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia, 1813), 145 (Book III, Chapter XXI).

<sup>357</sup> Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, 1988), 99 (Disputation 48, §2). I do not wish to entertain the question of whether eternity may be properly called a duration in this chapter since that question is so fraught with conceptual difficulties that it would result in an unacceptable digression from the matter at hand.

These accounts of divine timelessness, or of eternity, are unified by several features:

- (i) Atemporal – God exists outside of time and there is no temporal succession.
- (ii) *Totum Simul* – God beholds all temporal events tenselessly, as a single moment.
- (ii) Infiniteness – God’s timeless existence is in some sense infinite.<sup>358</sup>

These concepts are somewhat distinct – especially (i) and (ii), though they have historically been conflated. In 2011, Robert Pasnau attempted to clarify matters by introducing some fresh terminology. Pasnau not only distinguished between more familiar terms *atemporal* and *temporal*, but he also distinguished between what he calls *merechronicity* and *holochronicity*:

A *merechronic* entity partly exists at some instant in time, but also existed or will exist at other times, and does wholly exist at any one time.

A *holochronic* entity is one that is not merechronic. It exists as a whole, all at once, for all its existence, and does not partly exist at different times.<sup>359</sup>

Under Pasnau’s definitions, God – so described above – is atemporal (since He does not exist in time) and is holochronic (since He exists all at once, as a whole). That these two modes of being have been conflated or synthesised is unsurprising since atemporality necessarily entails holochronicity.<sup>360</sup> This holochronically timeless view is not, of course, unique to the Christian tradition. According to Maulana Muhammad Ali, such a view also holds for the Islamic conception of the divine, and adequately resolves the theological fatalist dilemma.<sup>361</sup> It is worth

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<sup>358</sup> The reader will note I am positing a more minimalist account of this traditional view of eternity compared to Stump and Kretzmann who posit four features of eternality. I do not mean to imply their analysis is wrong, simply that I have defined my terms more broadly.

<sup>359</sup> Robert Pasnau, ‘On Existing All at Once’, in: Christian Tapp and Edmundunggaldier (eds.), *God, Eternity, and Time* (Farnham, 2011), 11.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>361</sup> Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam: A Comprehensive Discussion of the Sources, Principles, and Practices of Islam* (Dublin, 2014), 230. Regrettably, Ali fails to furnish his assertion with any citations from the Qur’an or the Hadith.

noting that HTB also generally (perhaps even necessarily) entails a range of other suppositions, such as the claim that such a being has neither spatial location nor direction. This makes particular sense when we construed space and time as intrinsically connected, as modern cosmology suggests.

With that in mind, we can note that when Pike objects to ‘Yahweh’ being timeless, what he is fundamentally objecting to is the notion of a holochronically timeless being (HTB). It seems to me, then, that Pike’s claim is that appeals to holochronically timeless being, if such being can be demonstrated to be coherent and intelligible, can rebut the fatalist objection.

### III. Pike’s Objections

I identify three major concerns to HTB in Pike’s writing: (a) a timeless being would be impotent; (b) a timeless being could not be a person; and (c) there is no good positive case for timelessness. I intended to address these in order.

#### *HTB and Omnipotence*

Perhaps Pike’s most infamous objection to HTB is his allegation that it is inconsistent with omnipotence. Flipping Friedrich Schleiermacher’s assertion that omnipotence and timelessness are complementary and must be understood in conjunction with one another,<sup>362</sup> Pike argues that “[t]he claim that God preserves the universe the universe of natural objections seems no more compatible with the doctrine of timelessness than does the claim that God produces, or has the ability to produce, temporal states of affairs.”<sup>363</sup> For Pike, then, a HTB, such as God, cannot be omnipotent since He can neither create nor preserve temporal states of affairs.

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<sup>362</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh, 1956), §51f.

<sup>363</sup> Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 117.

Strictly speaking, Pike distinguishes between three distinct doctrines of God's power (omnipotence, creation, and preservation), but they can be treated together.

To support this claim, Pike relies upon three distinct assumptions:

(A1) An HTB cannot act in time.<sup>364</sup>

(A2) A HTB cannot *timelessly* produce temporal effects since such production requires temporality.<sup>365</sup>

(A3) An HTB could not preserve temporal states of affairs since such preservation requires temporality.<sup>366</sup>

In responding to these objections, it is worth noting that the defender of HTB is only really concerned with (A2) and (A3) since they maintain that that God does not act in time because He outside of it. (A1) is not so much a bullet to bite as a *plat principal* to be readily devoured.

Pike attack on timelessness in (A2) is somewhat unclear. He provides the following example to illustrate his objection:

If I know that Jones built a bird-house, I know that the building action occurred prior to the existence of the finished bird-house. The bird-house counts as finished only *after* the last piece has been nailed into place. The same would hold if I knew that Jones chiselled his name in the stone, painted a picture, wrote a story, moulded a nickel out of lead, etc. In each of these cases, the production-verb carries clear implications regarding the temporal position of the product relative to the creative-activity involved in its production.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 104-05.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 104-109.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 109-19.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 105.

Pike's objection seems to be predicated on a linguistic presupposition about production-verbs ('make', 'create', etc.) Such verbs, he maintains, convey relative temporal positions between the product and the creative activity that yielded the product. The implication being that to say God atemporally acts in such a way to produce temporal products (be they states of affairs, events, etc.) is to misunderstand what it means to make, create, and so forth. God cannot strictly produce because production is inherently temporal.<sup>368</sup>

One solution to this is to say that production-verbs do not necessarily convey relative temporal positions. For example, if the theory of special relativity is accepted, then one must hold that time (physical time, at least) began at the Big Bang. This raises the question: what produced the Big Bang, and consequently, time? It seems to me that on Pike's understanding of production-verbs, the question is not merely a tricky one, but an unintelligible one, for there would be no time to which to attach the temporal relation in production. Pike may well be right that production-verbs are inherently temporal but that is still unproven – and examples like the special relativity one ought to give us reason to doubt his claim. Moreover, Pike does seem to flirt with question begging here in that one would only accept that production-verbs inherently convey temporal connections if one first assumed that there are no possible instances of atemporal production – and that requires presuming that the HTB advocate's claim that God atemporally produces temporal effects is wrong. Subsequently, Pike's justification of (2) is premised on pretty shaky ground. Since he has not proven his claim about the temporal baggage of production-verbs, his argument is deficient.

Indeed, an instructive exercise is to attempt to formulate such production verbs without the temporal baggage in order to illustrate that not only does Pike's claim lack warrant, but that

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid.,106-07.

there is a plausible positive case against it. R. L. Sturch has provided one such formulation.<sup>369</sup>

Take the form of a production-verb proposition (call it V1):

V1: X is producing Y (where X designates some person)

Sturch proceeds to argue that V1 can be understood as:

V2: If X wishes Y to be, Y is; and X wishes Y to be.

Sturch notes that V2 lacks any temporal connotations; it does not require any temporal sequence to unfold. Given that, it seems to show that V1 itself does not necessarily imply any temporal relation. However, the question remains: are V1 and V2 equivalent? Take any random temporal act of production – let us say, for example, that ‘Theresa is creating a mess’. Does the statement ‘If Theresa wishes for a mess, and she does wish for a mess, then there is a mess’ convey the same meaning? That seems to me to be quite a jarring utterance and one that does not convey our initial meaning. Let us try another: ‘Walt is producing an image in his head’. If we translate that along Sturch’s lines, we yield ‘If Walt wishes an image in his head, and he does so wish, then there is an image in his head’. This seems to be a far more intelligible utterance and one which conveys the meaning well. What distinguishes our two statements? *Prima facie*, it seems the distinction lies in space. The first example does not translate well on Sturch’s framework since it involves spatially-located production. The latter translates quite sensibly because it is not spatially-located. The production is mental production. If our intuitions are right here, we can say Sturch is wrong that V1 and V2 convey essentially the same thing in an unqualified way. However, let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater. We can say that V1 and V2 are roughly equivalent provided the production is not spatially located. Let us turn again to divine production. According to HTB, God’s productive act is outside of space and time, and thus divine action would fit Sturch’s model,

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<sup>369</sup> R. L. Sturch, ‘The Problem of the Divine Eternity’, *Religious Studies* 10:4 (1974), 487-89.



thereby bypassing any temporal implications. As such, it seems we can at least crudely sketch a positive case against Pike's temporal production-verb thesis.

Moreover, another response to (2) is that offered by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, specifically, their doctrine of ET-simultaneity. ET-simultaneity denotes that species of simultaneity that "can obtain between what is eternal and what is temporal."<sup>370</sup> That is to say, it is the kind of simultaneity that explains the relation between the eternal and temporal mode of existence. Stump and Kretzmann define it as follows, where X and Y denote some entity or event:

(ET) For every x and for every y, x and y are ET-simultaneous iff:

- (i) either x is eternal and y is temporal, or vice-versa; and
- (ii) for some observer, A, in the unique eternal reference frame, x and y are both present – i.e. either x is eternally present and y is observed as temporally present, or vice-versa; and
- (iii) for some observer, B, is one of the infinitely many temporal reference frames, x and y are both present – i.e., either x is observed as eternally present and y is temporally present, or vice versa.

From this, Stump and Kretzmann argue that Pike's argument for (A2) trades on amphiboly (or syntactic ambiguity, for those of a more linguistic persuasion). In particular, they identify two premises in Pike's contention:

(12) "[I]f God is timeless, He could not have produced the mountain yesterday."

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<sup>370</sup> Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Eternity', *The Journal of Philosophy* 78:8 (1981), 436.

(13) "The claim that God timelessly produced a temporal object (such as the mountain) is absurd."<sup>371</sup>

Stump and Kretzmann notice that each of these premises can be read in one of two ways: in either the *compound* or the *divided* sense. The distinction was essential to medieval logic since a proposition could well be true in one sense but not the other. To illustrate, let us borrow an example from Aristotle in his *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, chapter XX, where he distinguished between:

(S1) I-saw-a-man-being-beaten with my eyes

(S2) I saw a man being-beaten-with-my-eyes<sup>372</sup>

The proposition 'I saw a man being beaten with my eyes', then, can be construed as either (S1), which is the divided sense, or (S2) which is the composite or compound sense. In sense (S1), it is quite a plausible claim. In sense (S2), it is obviously false – unless one has quite unusual eyes with violent proclivities.

Return to Stump and Kretzmann. They argue that (12) and (13) can be divided into separate senses as follows<sup>373</sup>:

(12a) If God is atemporal, he cannot yesterday have brought it about that a temporal object came into existence.

(12b) If God is atemporal, he cannot (atemporally) bring it about that a temporal object came into existence yesterday.

(13a) It is absurd to claim that God atemporally brings it about that a temporal object came into existence.

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<sup>371</sup> As quoted at: Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 449. Both quotations covered by citation.

<sup>372</sup> Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross, Volume I, (London, 1928), Chapter XX, 177b. The translation is that W. A. Pickard-Cambridge.

<sup>373</sup> Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 449. Numeration altered.

(13b) It is absurd to claim that God brings it about that a temporal object came into existence atemporally.

When Pike posits (12) and (13), Stump and Kretzmann assert, he is actually positing (12a) and (13b), but once that is understood, it removes the sting from Pike's argument. The defender of divine timelessness already accepts both of those premises. If Pike really wants to reach his conclusion, he needs to prove (12b) and (13a), which he has not done. Moreover, Pike can only affirm those premises if he first assumes that an act and its effect have a temporal relationship, and the ET-simultaneity doctrine is an account of how there be a causal relation that is not temporal. As such, if Pike wants to maintain his conclusions, he must show why the ET-simultaneity doctrine is false and then provide a positive case for (12b) and (13a).

Delmas Lewis has challenged this critique, arguing that Stump and Kretzmann misunderstood Pike. Lewis claims that Stump and Kretzmann mistakenly think Pike is arguing that "the concept of action in time per se is such that it is logically impossible to give a coherent account whereby God can be said to act in time."<sup>374</sup> The issue for Lewis, I think, is that that is what Pike does argue. He argues that on a traditional account of omnipotence, such as is defended by Stump and Kretzmann, God could not have any creative power. In postscript II, Pike explicitly clarifies that he is concerned with "the logical tension between the doctrine of God's timelessness on the one hand and the doctrines of omnipotence and creation on the other hand."<sup>375</sup>

Instead, Lewis assures us, Pike is concerned with "conceptual cognates."<sup>376</sup> I fear Lewis is teasing us with semantics. Pike argues that the very words 'create', 'make', etc., show an incompatibility between timelessness and omnipotence – that is to say, the very concept of

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<sup>374</sup> Delmas Lewis, 'Timelessness and Divine Agency', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 21:3 (1987), 146.

<sup>375</sup> Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 118.

<sup>376</sup> Lewis, 'Timelessness', 146.

production is inconsistent with timelessness. For Pike, the concept of production has temporal entailments that make it logically impossible for God to act in time, if He is timeless. Lewis is right that Pike is concerned with conceptual cognates but does not mean Pike is unconcerned by logical impossibility. He is analysing concepts to show a purported logical inconsistency.

In any case, Lewis offers the following interpretation of Pike's case:

(14) God brings it about that O comes into existence at T.

(15) If (14), then God brings it about at T that O comes into existence at T.

(16) If God brings it about at T that O comes into existence at T, then God exists at T.

(17) If God exists at T, then God is not timeless.

Therefore,

(18) If (14), then God is not time.<sup>377</sup>

(14) is standard theistic doctrine. (15) is more controversial. Lewis claims that (15) is a necessary truth demonstrable by the following principle (call it P1):

(P1) If God directly brings it about that X comes into existence at T, then God does something at T which God was not doing before T, such that X comes into existence at T and not before or after T.<sup>378</sup>

If (P1) demonstrates (15), and is necessary, then Lewis' interpretation of Pike's argument succeeds. The issue, it seems to me, is that (P1) is not true. It maintains that God does something at T – but that is merely to say God acts in the temporal mode, which is to presuppose the HTB position is false, thus begging the question. One can say God brings it about that X comes into existence at T, but it does not follow that that God is doing something

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 146. I have altered the numeration here.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 149. I have altered the numeration here.

at T that He was not doing elsewhere. In fact, Lewis anticipates this very objection.<sup>379</sup>

Regrettably, Lewis opts not to seek to refute the objection and defend (15), but instead claims that Pike's argument works without (15), so we can simply dismiss it. This, I think, ought to be read as an admission that his first formulation of Pike's argument fails.

Lewis then argues that Pike's claim was actually that, contrary to Stump and Kretzmann's assertions, (12b) and (13a) are not false but, in fact, necessarily true. If God is timeless, then a B-theory (or a tenseless theory) of time is true. From this tenseless account of time, Lewis deduces that if "God in the eternal present is unaware of an objective nonrelational difference between the existence of things present and the existence of things past and future, there is no such difference as there appears to be from our perspective in time."<sup>380</sup> Subsequently, there can be no temporal succession whatsoever in reality – even utterances of temporal successions are no more than *façons de parler*. Thus, God cannot produce temporal effects because He guarantees a B-theory of time which precludes any temporal succession.

This is certainly an interesting argument from Lewis, though it is hardly – despite his insistence to the contrary – Pike's thinking. However, it seems that Lewis has misunderstood the HTB position. Although God is timeless and experiences reality as *totum simul*, it does not necessarily follow from that God is unaware of differences between things in the temporal mode of being. Lewis seems to conflate the modes of being. It is perfectly true that on a HTB account that both, say, 'Jean Calvin ministers in Strasbourg' and 'President Trump visits the UK' both appear in the eternal present, but it does not follow from that that God does not know that in the temporal mode Calvin's ministering is temporally prior to Trump's UK visit. It is true that there is no ontological difference to God, but certainly there is an epistemological one that allows him awareness of any temporal distinctions of tense. This distinction is precisely

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 152.

what the ET-simultaneity thesis addresses. As such, it seems to me that both Lewis' formulations of Pike's argument fail and that his attempts to defend Pike's case is more of an exercise in *verschlimmbesserung* than rehabilitation. He has not succeeded in saving Pike's claim that timelessness is inconsistent with omnipotence.

Of course, Stump and Kretzmann's response can also be attacked on the basis of a more general critique of ET-simultaneity, such as that offered by Paul Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald claims that Stump and Kretzmann's account "do[es] not quite succeed", particularly in relation to the notion of 'atemporal duration'.<sup>381</sup> Stump and Kretzmann rightly retorted that Fitzgerald over-worked their analogy between E-duration and more recognisable forms of extension,<sup>382</sup> and I would suggest that Stump and Kretzmann's account remains, to date, the most sophisticated attempt at explaining the connection between temporal and eternal *relata* on the HTB theory. For present purposes, I will more modestly say that Stump and Kretzmann's contention is plausible. It might well be that Pike would find sufficient grounds to reject it. However, even granting that, Stump and Kretzmann have still shown that Pike's conflation of propositions in their divided and composite senses renders his argument futile. Even if Stump and Kretzmann cannot show how an atemporal God can produce temporal effects, it does not follow that Pike's position is true. He still bears a burden of proof to produce a better argument for his position since his current argument is quite unsatisfactory. It imports undue temporal connotations into production-verbs. Moreover, Lewis' attempt to rehabilitate Pike's contention has proven unsuccessful. Pike's claim that timelessness is inconsistent with omnipotence, therefore, fails.

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<sup>381</sup> Paul Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', *The Journal of Philosophy* 82:5 (1985), 260-69. Quotation on 260.

<sup>382</sup> Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration: a Reply to Fitzgerald', *The Journal of Philosophy* 84:4 (1987), 214-19.

On a conclusionary note, this same reasoning also refutes Pike's preservation argument is (A3). In that claim, Pike also relies upon the assumption that God would only exercise power if He were temporal. Having quite satisfactorily dispensed with that erroneous assumption, it is unnecessary to present an entirely new rebuttal of the preservation argument since what has already been established renders it - not God - powerless.

### *HTB and Agency*

The late Robert Coburn argued that a timeless being could not count as a person because a HTB could not engage in "remembering, anticipating, reflecting, deliberating, deciding, intending, and acting intention" because each of these capacities requires temporality.<sup>383</sup> Pike refuses to embrace Coburn's argument wholly (and rightly so):

So far as I can see, nothing that Coburn has said, or suggested, shows that a timeless individual could not have knowledge. But if a timeless individual could have knowledge [...] then we could at least conceive of the case in which a timeless individual would have to be counted as a person. This is true if it is also true that a timeless individual could not deliberate, anticipate, or remember.<sup>384</sup>

However, while Coburn fails to convince Pike completely, he triggers in him a reservation about the intelligibility of the notion of a timeless knower. Pike writes:

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<sup>383</sup> Robert C. Coburn, 'Professor Malcolm on God', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 41:2 (1963), 155. For context, Coburn is responding to Norman Malcolm's ontological argument. See: Norman Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', *The Philosophical Review* 69:1 (1960), 41-62.

<sup>384</sup> The foolishness of the argument as articulated by Coburn is treated by Pike (see: Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 125). Richard Taylor presented a similar argument (see: Richard Taylor, 'Deliberation and Foreknowledge', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1:1 (1964), 73-80; and Richard Taylor, 'Deliberation and Freedom', *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 6:4 (1968), 265-68). That argument too has been soundly rebuffed by Craig (see: Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 222-25).

It is not that knowing takes time or that knowing requires that there be a temporal relation between the knower and what he knows. The trouble is that a timeless being could not *act* in the various ways demanded by one who would qualify as knowing, believing, or being aware of something.<sup>385</sup>

Pike proceeds to ask the defender of HTB to explain just what is the difference between a timeless being who has knower and a timeless being without knowledge. Until this is given, one should be reluctant to accept divine timelessness.

It seems to me that Pike's argument can be stated simply as this: let us assume, *arguendo*, a timeless being, like God, can have knowledge. A timeless being still cannot act in time, which means God cannot respond or interact as a person ordinarily can be expected to be. If a timeless being is a person, he "would surely not rank very high on the personality scale"<sup>386</sup> since he cannot exhibit the types of behaviour that persons exhibit. He cannot, for example, comfort the widow (because (a) he can neither act in the temporal sphere; and (b) because to comfort a widow is to respond, and responses are temporally located since a response must be temporally posterior to the act being responded to). In short, if God is timeless, then He exhibits so little of the behaviours of personhood that – as Coburn says – He ought not really be counted as a person at all.

I must confess confusion at Pike's assertion that the defender of HTB must explain the difference between a timeless being who is a knower (viz. has knowledge) and a timeless being without knowledge. He uses the number '2' as an example of the latter, but that simply perplexes matters. Firstly, I am not at all sure whether it makes it sense to speak of the number '2' as a timeless being in some way analogous to a timeless being, like God, without knowledge. Pike seems to be importing some unproven meta-ontological commitments. Pike himself

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<sup>385</sup> Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 127.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 128.



seems to acknowledge that the relevant distinction between the two is mental cognition. A being who knows, timeless or not, must be a being with cognition in that at the very least it must have a capacity for knowledge.<sup>387</sup> I fail to see however what this is supposed to prove in Pike's argument against timeless personhood.

Fundamentally, I think we can set that confusion aside since complying with Pike's request is a gratuitous extravagance that will merely pollute our attempts to get to the crux of the matter.

Upon closer inspection, his argument is predicated upon the assumption that God cannot act in a way a person would because God cannot act so as to cause effects in time. This was addressed in a preceding section and since the premise that God cannot act to produce temporal effects in time was found wanting, the personality argument can likewise be rejected.

At this juncture, Pike might concede the point and accept that God, if timeless, can produce temporal effects – but He can only do so in a way that is unlike a person. Pike makes some allusion to this:

Let us suppose that we know there to be an incorporeal being in the room [...] In the course of conversation, I assert: 'There is no apple in the barrel'. We hear a voice say: 'Yes there is.' I challenge the statement. In response to my challenge we hear the voice say: 'Put up your money.' We see a five dollar bill waving vigorously in the air and come to rest on the table. A moment later we see the apple rising slowly from the barrel. The voice says: 'I told you so'. Given enough data of this sort, I think we might eventually have to admit that the incorporeal being knew (or at least believed) that there was an apple in the barrel. We might hesitate to say that he had spoken to us or that he

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 123-25.

had walked to the barrel and picked up the apple. But someone might suggest that while the incorporeal being did not speak, he brought it about that a voice was heard.<sup>388</sup>

While Pike does not make this particular argument, there is an impression that this sort of proxy relationship that an incorporeal, atemporal, timeless being must have with temporal creation is not what one would ordinarily construe as the behaviour of a person. Arguably, extrapolating Pike's thinking, the fact that a timeless God would operate in such a way undermines His personhood. After all, take the claim 'God cares for the orphan'. Typically, if a person cares for an orphan, they themselves undertaken some material action to improve the orphan's welfare. In the case of a HTB, such a being cannot themselves undertake any material action, but must operate through secondary causes.

In response to this speculative pseudo-Pike objection to timelessness, I think it ought to be said firstly that there seems to be nothing inherent in 'personhood' that precludes operating via secondary causes. Indeed, as David Oderberg has noted, virtually all medieval philosophical commentators agree that God in some sense concurs with secondary causes.<sup>389</sup> The traditional understanding of divine personhood has no obvious conflict with secondary cause operations. Moreover, while it is true that a HTB does not comply fully with an ordinary understanding of how a person behaves, that is hardly a concern to the theist (or indeed deist). To quote a Psalm, "There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours."<sup>390</sup> God is unlike any of being, so the fact that His personhood manifests itself in an extraordinary way is no basis for a sound objection. It seems then that pseudo-Pike's argument does not carry him to his conclusion.

### *Lack of Positive Arguments for Divine Timelessness*

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>389</sup> David S. Oderberg, 'Divine Premotion', *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 79 (2016), 208.

<sup>390</sup> Psalm 86:8 (English Standard Version).

Finally, Pike's rejection of divine timeless is predicated upon what he deems to be a lack of good arguments for holochronically timeless being. Having surveyed only two proposed justifications of the doctrine, that of Anselm and Friedrich Schleiermacher, Pike finds that no adequate argument has been given for it.<sup>391</sup>

Let us dispense first with the fact that Pike's sample is woefully limited and therefore his conclusion is, to be candid, premature. Let us also not digress into a paper offering a new positive case for divine timelessness and instead maintain our focus on Pike's claim by refuting Pike's claim that Anselm's 'perfect being' argument does not constitute a plausible positive argument for divine timelessness.

At the heart of Anselm's theology is a simple maxim: God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" (*aliquid quod maius non cogitari potest*).<sup>392</sup> Although Anselm originally posited the definition to support an ontological argument for the existence of God, the concept, as Thomas Williams has noted, "of that than which nothing greater can be thought turns out to be marvelously fertile."<sup>393</sup> Subsequently, within it or some similar proposition, one can sow the seeds of divine timelessness, of holochronically timeless being.

According to Anselm, the maxim that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived entails that God is timeless, just as it entails that God is immutable, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and so forth.<sup>394</sup> Pike's exposition of Anselm is lengthy but the conclusion of this analysis is that "[t]hough I have tried to look at this matter sympathetically, I have not been able to discover any clear logical connection between the idea that God is a being a [sic.] greater

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<sup>391</sup> Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 130-90.

<sup>392</sup> St. Anselm, *Proslogium*, 7 (Chapter II).

<sup>393</sup> Thomas Williams, 'Saint Anselm', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anselm/>>, accessed: 03/06/2019.

<sup>394</sup> St. Anselm, *Proslogium*, 19-20 (Chapter XIII); cf. Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, 2000), 47ff.

than which cannot be conceived and the idea that God is timeless.”<sup>395</sup> In particular, Pike expresses concern that it is unclear whether the Anselmian maxim should be interpreted literally or as ‘God is a being more worthy of worship than which cannot be conceived’. If this latter interpretation, Pike does not understand the inference to divine timelessness.<sup>396</sup>

Pike first attacks the standard interpretation of the Anselmian maxim, namely that the maxim expresses propositions such ‘God is greatest of all being’ and ‘God is a supreme and perfect being’, since that interpretation is often used to infer divine timelessness. The issue for Pike is that this standard interpretation is wrong. He writes:

[W]e must dismiss [Norman] Malcolm’s claim that ‘God is a being a [sic.] greater than which cannot be conceived’ is a way of making explicit: “‘God is the greatest of all being’ is a necessary truth’. These two statements are logically independent (neither entails nor is entailed by the other). Thus, they could not be alternative ways of saying the same thing.<sup>397</sup>

It seems to me that Pike is quite right here – but that is of no consequence. The defender of HTB can simply reformulate Anselm’s maxim along the lines of ‘God is a maximally great being’, to borrow Alvin Plantinga’s terminology.<sup>398</sup> As such, even if Pike is right that the traditional Anselmian maxim does not entail timelessness, the Plantingan revision of it might. However, Pike refuses to allow the theist any wiggle room by attacking the very concept of divine perfection and maximal greatness. Pike laments that value-judgements about so-called divine perfections are tricky. He invites us to imagine two doors, one of which signifies an alleged perfection and one which signifies its negation:

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<sup>395</sup> Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 165.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>398</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (London, 1975), 107-08.

Try ‘immutable’ on the first door and ‘not-immutable’ on the second. If the only thing we know about an object is that it cannot change, I cannot see that this would give us reason for preserving it over an object that can change. If [sic.] might be better if there existed an intelligent, benevolent, wise, etc., being that cannot change rather than a similar being that can change [...] But this does not show that the inability to change is, itself, a value-making feature of objects.<sup>399</sup>

Certainly, it must be conceded, as the example makes clear, that value-judgements of this sort can be challenging. However, as a rejoinder to Pike, I think one can say that a pretty uncontroversial value judgement is that necessary existence is a value-making feature, and that a maximally great being is one that exists necessarily. A being that exists necessarily, as Avicenna argued, is perfect because it lacks nothing of its own existence and, moreover, is the source from which all other existence must be derived.<sup>400</sup> To exist necessarily is intuitively greater than existing contingently since the latter depends on the former. Brian Leftow explains: “to be immune to so much of the possibility of nonexistence is to exist with the maximum degree of security, to be maximally rooted in reality. We consider our liability not to exist an imperfection, a quality of existence we regret.”<sup>401</sup> Of course, the conception of necessary existence as a perfection is not without its critics, but at the very least, it is a very plausible possible perfection.

Granting that necessary existence constitutes a perfection, we may turn to timelessness. Leftow has argued, quite convincingly, that whatever exists necessarily is intrinsically timeless. Leftow’s argument is highly technical so it will suffice here to provide the gist. If God exists necessarily, either He is temporal or timeless. If He is temporal, time is necessary (since if temporality were not necessary, God would not be temporal). If He is timeless, time is contingent. We know that

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<sup>399</sup> Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 147.

<sup>400</sup> Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna* (Oxford, 2010), 171.

<sup>401</sup> Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, 1991), 270.

time is, in fact, contingent. Subsequently, God must be timeless, not temporal.<sup>402</sup> If this argument is correct, then it seems we can construct the following Anselmian argument for divine timelessness.

(19) If God is a maximally great being, He has the perfection of necessary existence.

(20) The perfection of necessary existence entails timelessness.

(21) Therefore, if God is a maximally great being, He must be timeless.

It seems to me that Pike has two options here: first, he can deny that necessary existence is a perfection; and second, he can deny the contingency of time. As Craig notes, the Newtonians take this latter route since they hold time to be concomitant with God.<sup>403</sup> However, this latter option does not seem like it would appeal to Pike. After all, if Pike denies the contingency of time, he would be logically committed to its necessity. Pike famously argued that if there is no necessary being, nothing exists.<sup>404</sup> If that were so, it would suggest that time must be contingent and dependent upon a necessary being, unless of course time is itself a necessary being. I do not think Pike would much care for the denial of the contingency of time and, even if he did, I think there are sound grounds on which to affirm such contingency, though we shall not presently digress there.

More likely, Pike would contest (19) on the grounds that such analysis of maximal greatness is suspect, but we have already provided some reasons for accepting necessary existence despite Pike's reservations. However, there is potentially another move Pike might take. Pike has argued that God might be omnipotent in the actual world but that does not entail that He is omnipotent in all possible worlds. This would entail the conclusion that God is not *necessarily*

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 270ff.

<sup>403</sup> William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity (The Coherence of Theism II: Eternity)* (Dordrecht, 2001), 19.

<sup>404</sup> Nelson Pike, 'If there is no Necessary Being, Nothing Exists', *Noûs* 11:4 (1977), 417-20.

omnipotent.<sup>405</sup> It is conceivable that Pike would entertain a similar argument for existence. God might well exist in the actual world, but He does not have *necessary* existence since it is quite sensible to posit that He does not exist in some possible worlds. Moreover, if God does not have necessary existence, the deduction to timelessness falls through.

What such an objection fails to recognize, however, is that if one speaks of a God that does not exist necessarily, one is not really speaking of God at all since, by our definition, God must be necessary. Now, this raises a question for HTB. Must a HTB be necessary? I have assumed as much and equated the concept with ‘God’ for present purposes. Indeed, as shown above, a maximally great being – God- must also be a holochronically timeless being. The objection fails because, as Yujin Nagasawa has argued, a maximally great being must possess His perfections necessarily, rather than coincidentally, since the former is greater than the latter.<sup>406</sup>

Subsequently, Pike’s assertion that there are no good positive arguments for divine timelessness is both premature and, upon further examination, false. One can quite satisfactorily formulate a plausible Anselmian argument that demonstrates divine timelessness from the doctrine of necessary existence (aseity).

### Concluding Remarks

In this brief chapter, I hope to have shown that Nelson Pike’s tentative rejection of divine timelessness was a mistake. Pike argued that if divine timelessness could be demonstrated, then the theological fatalist objection could be refuted. In rebutting Pike’s two main objections to divine timelessness, and providing a positive argument for it, I hope to have provided sufficient reason for Pike and his disciples to accept a holochronically timeless account of God as a solution to theological fatalist dilemma. Further, I believe I have offered some rehabilitation of

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<sup>405</sup> Nelson Pike, ‘Omnipotence and God’s Ability to Sin’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6:3 (1969), 208–216

<sup>406</sup> Yujin Nagasawa, ‘A New Defence of Anselmian Theism’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 58:233 (2008), 579.

a long and established theological outlook rooted in Boethius and have provided some consolation to his philosophy. In responding to Pike's theological fatalism on his own terms, it is to be stressed again that this response is neither an admission of the soundness of Pike's argument nor a rejection of the *essential omniscience* solution. It is merely a demonstration that the traditional concept of divine timelessness is, contrary to Pike's protestations, a coherent and defensible account (*audiatur et altera pars*). That is not to say what I have presented is a full or complete account of HTB, but it is at least a cursory defence of the doctrine against its most prominent critic.





## Chapter 7: In Defence of Timeless Acting

### Timeless Acting

As we have seen, the view that God is timeless raises a number of philosophical issues. The most prominent of these is the question of how a timeless God can act in a temporal world. It is this issue that this section will seek to address. I will begin by explaining the issue with an analogy to the mind-body interactionism problem, before sketching out some potential explanations and solutions to demonstrate the coherence of the view that a timeless God, acting timelessly, can produce temporal effects.

There are, in fact, two manifestations of the problem of divine acting: (a) how a timeless God can interact with a temporal world; and (b) how a timeless God can change. In regard to the second question, the argument runs something as follows: If God is to act, he needs to have the capacity for change. He needs to be able to, say, change his mind in response to human petition. If God is unable to genuinely change, then He is simply determined, which contradicts the notion of God as perfectly free. So, the argument runs, if God is to properly be able to freely act, He needs to be capable of change. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus, saying that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world [... and ...] he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”,<sup>407</sup> we take it God’s ability to effect action involves some free volition, which requires that He is able to change His mind. Nicholas Wolterstorff has presented an argument along these lines in his classic essay ‘God Everlasting’:

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<sup>407</sup> 1 Ephesians 4:6

God the Redeemer is a God who *changes*. And any being that changes is a being among whose states there is temporal succession [...] *[O]ntologically*, God cannot be a redeeming God without there being changeful variation among God's states.<sup>408</sup>

Sidestepping the soteriological content that is more the domain of the theologians, Wolterstorff's objective here is to establish inconsistency between divine timelessness and God's capacity for change. Indeed, unless God can change, He cannot *act* to redeem. Insofar as that example holds, Wolterstorff's argument can be broadly construed as the assertion that divine action is logically impossible if God is timeless. In other words, acting involves changing states. Bringing this back to (b) and developing Wolterstorff's thought, we might say something like the following: God's will can only choose to redeem if He can do otherwise, and He can only do otherwise if He is capable of change (e.g. changing His mind would be a change of state). This would necessitate that God is not timeless, for a timeless God cannot change. God can only have act freely if He is temporal.

The most promising line of argument we can take here is to merely bite the bullet and say that God does not exercise free choice in the sense of being able to choose between actions to undertake. However, that is of no consequence in my view, for what makes God's action free is not just His capacity to choose among competing possibilities, but that His action is not compelled by anything external to Himself – as was discussed in chapter 2. In other words, we dispense with this Kantian notion of free agency consisting in the capacity to do otherwise in favour of Hobbes' assertion that "A free agent is he that can do as he will, and forbear as he will, and that liberty is the absence of external impediments."<sup>409</sup> Indeed, this conception of divine agency seems to find some favour in Anselm's analysis in *Cur Deus Homo* where he rejects

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<sup>408</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring About God: Selected Essays*, I, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge, 2010), 133-34.

<sup>409</sup> As quoted at: Robert Sleigh, Jr., Vere Chappell, Michael Rocca, 'Determinism and Human Freedom', in: Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, II (Cambridge, 1998), 1222.

PAP using Frankfurt-style counter-examples.<sup>410</sup> There is certainly some attractiveness in this view, at least intuitively. If we combine this view with other divine attributes, such as benevolence, it does paint a coherent account of theism. Peter of Poitiers articulates this point when exploring the question of whether God can only do what is good.<sup>411</sup> It would seem to be logically impossible for a perfectly good God to act in such a way that is wicked,<sup>412</sup> for then He would not be perfectly good. If that is so, then when God does good, it is because He could not have done otherwise. This seems to comport well within the broader Hobbesian conception of freedom that does not rely on some version of the principle of alternative possibilities.

However, particularly within the Thomistic-Molinist framework, this sort of claim appears rather troublesome. When we talk of God surveying possible worlds and choosing one, we do seem (implicitly) to be accepting some level degree of optionality. For example, in his Molinist schematic, John Laing interprets the survey as God exploring how each possible world corresponds to His “intentions and desires.”<sup>413</sup> The implication of this view is clear: God can, and does, choose. Yet even in this case, God is constrained by His intentions and desires, which merely pushes the question back a step. If God’s intentions are what they are by the necessity of His nature, and His intentions determine His action, then does He really exercise free choice? Is he not compelled, as Leibniz would suggest, to create the best of all possible worlds on account of His perfect goodness?<sup>414</sup> In other words, God’s goodness necessitates that God has perfectly good intentions and desires, which necessitates that He act in a certain way.

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<sup>410</sup> On this, see: Katherin A. Rogers, *Freedom and Creation: Anselmian Libertarianism* (Oxford, 2015), 155ff.

<sup>411</sup> Peter of Poitiers, *Sentences*, Book 1, chapter 8, as discussed at: Ivan Boh, ‘Divine Omnipotence in the Early Sentences’, in: Tamar Rudavsky (ed.), *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (Boston, 1985), 200ff.

<sup>412</sup> This is of course challenged by Richard Price who famously argued that for God to be free, He must be capable of evil. See: Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford, 1948), 245-47.

<sup>413</sup> John. D. Laing, ‘On Parsing the Knowledge and Will of God, or Calvinism and Middle Knowledge in Conversation’, in: John D. Laing, Kirk R. MacGregor, and Greg Welty (eds.), *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge: a Conversation* (Eugene, 2019), ch.11.

<sup>414</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy*, ed. Austin M. Farrer (New York, 2010), *passim*.

As such, it seems that even the Molinist seems to struggle to uphold alternative possibilities in their theory of divine action – something we need to resist if we want to preserve God’s freedom, as defined as the ability to act otherwise. Given that, the Molinist seems to have two options: First, she seems to be left with the choice to accept the Hobbesian account of free agency and hold that God could not choose any world other than the actual world should not be viewed as problematic. If God were to be able to choose outside of what His nature required, then that would be a defect. Alternatively, she could hold that God’s goodness necessitates He act toward some general good, not particular goods. For example, if there are two equally good options, there is no logical reason why God cannot choose between them. Likewise, if there are several good but not equally so options, it is far from obvious that God cannot choose among them. To be perfectly good does not necessarily mean He must choose the more good [sic.] option. In that case, God enjoys both alternative possibilities even within the constraints of His goodness.

To return to the argument we developed from Wolterstorff, the argument seems to be that God needs to be changing, to be able to exercise the sort of volition where if He were presented with two options, He can pick one over the other – and change His mind. It seems to assume that God’s agency consists in choosing between two possibilities, between redeeming and not redeeming. That God is static and cannot change His course might seem mechanical and defective, *prima facie*, but it is that the fact that He cannot veer from who He is that makes Him *God*. A God who can change His mind about redemption, for example, is far more impoverished deity than He whose very nature compels His choice to rescue His people. Given God does not need to change to act, it likewise follows that He does not need to be temporal. Assuming that free action consists in not being externally coerced, God’s actions – while determined by His nature – are free without abandoning timelessness. Furthermore, a God who changes course may be imperfect but a God who chooses a course among options

and sticks to it does not seem to be. God does not need to change, and therefore be temporal, to act since He can timelessly act in the way He wishes from a selection of options. As such, even from the get-go, the argument developed from Wolterstorff is weak.

In relation to the more substantial objection in (a), a helpful way of understanding this argument is with an analogy to the mind-body interaction problem in the philosophy of mind.

According to traditional Cartesian substance dualism, there exists two substances: the mind or soul, and the body. The body was, for Descartes, “nothing but a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us.”<sup>415</sup>

These substances – the material body and the immaterial soul – interacted with and affected each other. This, as a certain Princess Palatine of Bohemia noted, raises the question of how exactly this interaction is to occur:

Given that the soul of a human being is only a thinking substance, how can it affect the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions?<sup>416</sup>

It is unclear as to how an immaterial entity and a material entity can interact. It is this so-called ‘mind-body problem’, the so-called “ghost in the machine”,<sup>417</sup> that has been the defining criticism of Cartesian dualism. Yet the question asked by Princess Elisabeth is also pertinent to our question: how can an immaterial God, who is also out of time, affect material things, that are in time? For a great deal of philosophers, the idea that a timeless God can act in time is as implausible Cartesian dualism because the mechanics of interaction are unclear. As the late Clark Pinnock wrote:

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<sup>415</sup> René Descartes, ‘Treatise on Man’, in: Mark A. Bedau and Carol E. Cleland (eds.), *The Nature of Life: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives from Philosophy and Science* (Cambridge, 2010), 15.

<sup>416</sup> As quoted at: Lynda Gaudemard, *Rethinking Descartes’ Substance Dualism* (Cham, 2021), 4.

<sup>417</sup> This stems from Gilbert Ryle’s famous argument in: Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago, 2000).

If he were timeless, God would be unable to work salvation in history, would be cut off from the world, have no real relationship with people and would be completely static.<sup>418</sup>

A timeless God, in other words, can no more interact with a temporal world, than an immaterial soul can interact with a material body. If it is true that a timeless God cannot act in relation to the world, then this spells real trouble for the doctrine of timelessness, especially the Thomistic-Molinist synthesis that we are proposing. As a defender of timelessness, I should wholeheartedly concur with Pinnock that a timeless God cannot act in time. That is not a claim that the classical theist need maintain. It would be incoherent to say that God, who is outside of time, acts in time; it would be akin to saying that a boy who is outside of a room throws a ball and smashes a vase while in the room. Instead, following Aquinas and Molina as discussed in previous chapters, we should argue that *God timelessly produces effects in time*. It is not that the boy is in the room throwing the ball, but that he throws the ball into the room, thereby smashing the vase from the outside. I have already discussed Nelson Pike and Delmas Lewis' objection to this concept in our discussion of the doctrine of timelessness, so it would be helpful to provide some sort of explanation of how timeless acting occurs.

A fairly common analysis of events views events as temporal. Expanding on Quine and Russell, Anthony Quinton argues that events are temporal.<sup>419</sup> If we assume all action involves some event, then on this analysis, all action is temporal. This is a common-sense view. The action of bowling a ball is an event that transpires over an elapsed period of time. I suspect this understanding of the connection between events and time is a majority view among philosophers today. The idea is that events are dynamic things in time. It is the change from one state of affairs to another as time elapses. If that's so, how can the event of creating the

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<sup>418</sup> Clark Pinnock, 'Systematic Theology', in: Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger (eds.), *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, 1994), 120.

<sup>419</sup> Anthony Quinton, 'Spaces and Times', *Philosophy* 37 (1962), 130-47.

world, and therefore time, occur timelessly? God would need to act outside of time to create time, but you need time to act. It would also rule out any pre-temporal events, such as were entertained in Augustine's musings of God's daily life 'prior' to creation.<sup>420</sup> However, it is unclear to me why events must be analysed in terms of temporality. That we do, like Humeans, import temporality into our analysis seems more of a product of our experience of events in the temporal world than anything else.<sup>421</sup> The counter to this is that events must be dynamic and that requires time, but I am unconvinced of this. While I do not have a definitive answer, let me sketch three explanations of how one might respond to this objection, in addition to the Stump-Kretzmann solution outlined earlier.

First, we could argue that God's consciousness is itself an event, a sort of 'specious present'.<sup>422</sup> If God's experience of all time *qua* present is a single mental event, then that would be a timeless mental event. Ergo, there would be a timeless event. This would account for any explanation of pre-temporal events, such as God surveying possible worlds in His mind. What is meant by this? If we affirm that there are pre-temporal events, God's consciousness would be a reasonably good candidate because there are things 'happening' in the divine mind. It is unclear if these events would really involve God acting, but it is at the very least arguable that the goings-on of the divine mind would constitute some sort of mental action. If that is so, this would be an arguable instance of timeless acting, which counts in favour of divine timelessness.

Second, we can argue that when we observe that events are dynamic, we are simply viewing the effects. Suppose that James Montmarquet is correct when he argues:

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<sup>420</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York, 1982), 4.15.26.

<sup>421</sup> By this, I simply refer to Humean empiricism.

<sup>422</sup> This is an idea explored in: Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, 1991), 284.



Acts of bringing about bodily movements are not identical with the bodily movements in whose bringing about they consist. The raising of an arm is not the same event as the rising of an arm.<sup>423</sup>

We could well argue that the rising of the arm (the event we see as temporal) is distinct from what could well be an atemporal event (the raising of an arm). In much the same way, God's parting of the Red Sea is an atemporal event, whereas the parting of the Red Sea is the temporal event that we see as the effect of that.

Third, we can simply deny that all action involves some event and by-pass the issue altogether. There is, *prima facie*, nothing logically or metaphysically impossible with timeless acting. In the absence of some demonstration that it is impossible, timeless action should not be ruled out. The onus is just as much on those wed to action in time to justify their view. There should not be a presumption against timelessness simply because a Humean disposition to daily experience.

To link back to the substance dualism analogy, the dualist's success or failure hinges on providing a bridge between the material and immaterial. For our purposes, we need to build a bridge between time and eternity, and while that cannot be built rigidly, we can at the least sketch a blueprint and lay a foundation for it in such a way that timeless divine action cannot be ruled out.

Consequently, we can say that (i) while God is determined by His nature, that does not entail that He is not free to act. God's freedom, properly construed, lies in His aseity and omnipotence in that He is wholly free of external coercion. Furthermore, there are defensible ways to maintain that God enjoys some form of PAP even within the constraints of His necessary goodness. Likewise, we can say (ii) that while the concept of timeless acting runs

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<sup>423</sup> James Montmarquet, 'Actions and Bodily Movements', 38:3 (1978), 138.

counter to our daily experience, it is coherent concept that cannot be dismissed out of hand. From this, we can conclude that it is possible for God to freely act timelessly, as the Thomists and Molinists claim. With this established, the compatibility of those accounts of providence demonstrably are not falsified by the accusation that timeless acting is logically incoherent.

## Chapter 8: In Defence of a Dynamic Conception of Time

### In Defence of a Dynamic Conception of Time

It was earlier suggested that God's eternity does not depend on a particular conception of time. This is true, *ipso facto*, but presently we are concerned with the question of God's knowledge of singular future contingent propositions and its compatibility with creaturely freedom (i.e., the freedom to do otherwise). As such, we are concerned with how the truth of those propositions relates to the temporal series. In this chapter, I intend to argue that the Thomist and Molinist should accept a dynamic, as opposed to static, conception of time. A major motivation for this is that a dynamic conception of time coheres more naturally with an open view of the future. I reject Craig's assertion that such a conception of time supports the case that God is temporal.<sup>424</sup> Rather, a dynamic conception of time is necessary to account for plausible and widely held metaphysical commitments, such as temporal becoming, but that this is wholly consistent with God being timeless. As such, I argue for a dynamic conception of time as opposed to a static one, and for the consistency of that with a timeless God.

#### I. Definitions

In the literature of the philosophy of time, there has been an expansion of the terminology used to refer to time from dynamic to static, for relationalism to substantivism. In this chapter, we are primarily concerned with two terms *dynamic* and *static*, the theories at the heart of what Michael Tooley has rightly observed is "the most fundamental question in the philosophy of time."<sup>425</sup> Scholars have further demarcated between an A-theory of time versus a B-theory, or a tensed theory of time versus a tenseless theory of time. However, as Eunsoo Kim has noted, these are generally synonymous with the dynamic versus static distinction.<sup>426</sup> In the spirit of that,

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<sup>424</sup> William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, 2001), 115.

<sup>425</sup> Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford, 1997), 13.

<sup>426</sup> Eunsoo Kim, *Time, Eternity, and the Trinity: A Trinitarian Analogical Understanding of Time and Eternity* (Eugene, 2010), 136-37.

I will be using the terms as synonyms. In fact, we can trace the development of the terminology quite clearly. To recap an earlier chapter: the A and B theory terminology emerged first in G. E. M. McTaggart in 1908 to denote the fundamental differences between the dynamic and static conception, only for D.H. Mellor to revise the terminology in his landmark *Real Time*, in which denotes the A-theories and B-theories as tensed and tenseless time respectively.<sup>427</sup> In *Real Time II*, Mellor retracts this recharacterization of the distinction in favour of an amended version of McTaggart's formulation.<sup>428</sup> It is worth noting that this synonymy is not universal (for instance, the presentist theory of dynamic time has been explored without appeal to A-theory, or at least A-properties, in an important 2012 article by Joshua Rasmussen).<sup>429</sup> Since my argument for a dynamic theory of time does not fundamentally depend on synonymy, the reference to the A and B theories can be understood more as a functional observation for navigating the literature.

According to a dynamic conception of time, the flow of time is objectively real. Consequently, tense, temporal becoming, and temporal relations are real, genuine features of the world. A crucial feature of this is the claim that time is anisotropic and directional (that is, time moves forward).<sup>430</sup> Time is an objective feature of the world. Dynamic theorists will typically be of two stripes: either *presentists* and *growing block theorists*. The former group, which is commonly associated with Ned Markosian but has routes in the theological tradition stretching back to Augustine,<sup>431</sup> holds (most crudely) that only the present exists. The past is gone and has ceased

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<sup>427</sup> J. M. E. McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time', *Mind* 17 (1908), 456-73; and D. H. Mellor, *Real Time* (Cambridge, 1981), 1-13.

<sup>428</sup> D. H. Mellor, *Real Time II* (London, 2002), esp. 1-15.

<sup>429</sup> Joshua Rasmussen, 'Presentists May say Goodbye to A-properties', *Analysis* 72:2 (2012), 270-76; Oaklander also subscribes to a tenseless dynamic theory. On Oaklander's contributions, see: L. Nathan Oaklander, 'The New Tenseless Theory of Time', *Philosophical Studies* 58 (1990), 287-92; and L. Nathan Oaklander, 'On the Experience of Tenseless Time', *Journal of Philosophical Research* 18 (1993), 159-66.

<sup>430</sup> Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity*, 161.

<sup>431</sup> Ned Markosian, 'A Defense of Presentism', in: Dean W. Zimmerman (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, II, (Oxford, 2004), 47-82. On Augustine and presentism, see: Augustine, *Confessions*, XI; cf. David Armitage, 'In Defense of Presentism', in: Darrin M. McMahon (ed.), *History and Human Flourishing* (New York, 2023), 63.

to be, and the future is not yet here. Theodore Sider, a critic of presentism, describes the view nicely:

Presentism is the doctrine that only the present is real [...] A presentist thinks that everything is present; more generally, that, necessarily, it is always true that everything is (then) present.<sup>432</sup>

Later in the chapter, I will qualify this conception to the temporal domain. For now, it is sufficient to note the broad meaning of the term. The presentist view might, *prima facie*, seem rather odd in its denial of the reality of the past. The assertion that the past is not real seems to be a rather strange one but our intuitive scepticism can be eased by stating the presentist point more carefully. The presentist does not say the past does not exist *simpliciter*; rather, it existed *qua* present at some antecedent time but no longer does. Thus, we can say it ‘existed’ but that it no longer ‘exists’.

This concern with the reality of the past brings us to latter group, the growing block theorists.<sup>433</sup> This theory, which has been most ably defended by Michael Tooley, finds its origins in C. D. Broad’s 1923 critique of eternalism.<sup>434</sup> Broad described the theory thusly:

Nothing has happened to the present by becoming past except that fresh slices of existence have been added to the total history of the world. The past is thus as real as the present. On the other hand, the essence of a present event is, not that it precedes future events, but that there is quite literally nothing to which it has the relation of precedence. The sum total of existence is always increasing, and it is this which gives the time-series a sense [i.e. direction] as well as an order. A moment *t* is later than a

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<sup>432</sup> Theodore Sider, ‘Presentism and Ontological Commitment’, *The Journal of Philosophy* 96:7 (1999), 325.

<sup>433</sup> Craig does not consider this to be a dynamic A theory *per se*. See: William Lane Craig and James D. Sinclair, ‘The Kalam Cosmological Argument’, in: William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion of Natural Theology* (Oxford, 2009), 115.

<sup>434</sup> C.D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (London, 1923). Broad began as an eternalist, defending it in 1921 (C.D. Broad, ‘Time’, in: J. Hastings et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics and Religion*, XXII (Edinburgh, 1921).

moment  $t^*$  if the sum total of existence at  $t$  includes the sum total of existence  $t^*$  together with something more.<sup>435</sup>

Like the presentist view, Broad's growing block view affirms the reality of temporal passage, the reality of the present, and the non-reality of the future. However, it distinguishes itself by affirming a commitment to the reality of the past. As Broad indicates, the past is as real as the present because the past *was* present; the reality of that isn't changed by the addition of "fresh slices of existence" to the future. The flow of time, on this view, corresponds to the expansion of the sum total existence. An illustration is of use here: suppose I have a marble in a box labelled 'present'. Imagine now that I add a new marble. At that point, the original marble must be moved into another box labelled 'past' and the new marble is put in the 'present' box. Suppose I add yet another marble. In that case, the second marble is placed in the 'past' box with the first marble, and the third marble is placed in the 'present' box. The crucial point here is that even though the marbles move boxes as new marbles, new slices of existence, are added, the marbles are nonetheless all equally real.

Given dynamic theorists of time hold either that the present is real or that the past and present is real, there emerges the question of whether a dynamic theorist of time could hold that all three tenses are real but that there is still *genuine* temporal flow. In this chapter, we will explore this question with reference to God's knowledge of non-existents, but for now we will note that it is a view that lacks explication in the literature.

In this chapter too, we will be stressing that a dynamic conception of time allows for an *open future*, by which is meant that because the future does not yet exist, at least not in the temporal mode. As a presentist notion is defended, the future is left open – an essential feature for free will. As we will see in later chapters, this 'open' future is qualified by the existence of the eternal

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<sup>435</sup> Broad, *Scientific Thought*, 66-67.

mode, but in the temporal mode, it remains firmly open in order to ensure free will. By denying the reality of the future, presentism is a dynamic theory of time that lends credence to our solution to theological fatalism.

The static conception of time, which (as noted) is sometimes construed as the B-theory of time or as *eternalism*,<sup>436</sup> holds that tense designations (past, present, and future) are illusory or psychological. That is to say, time is not an objective feature of the world; what we call past, present, and future are all equally real (that is, on an ontological par).<sup>437</sup> To visualise this, we may borrow an illustration from Henri Bergson. Imagine the whole of time as a film reel. We can place the reel into a projector, our consciousness, and play it. The projector takes the static reel and produces something seemingly dynamic. Likewise, the projectors of our minds take the static time and construe it as dynamic when, in fact, the flow of tensed time we perceive is illusory. It is no more than a series of individual frames or events ordered in a certain way.<sup>438</sup> As a consequence, temporal becoming is likewise illusory. Instead, static theorists that moments of time are sequenced in terms of immutable relations of earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than. To illustrate the distinction with a dynamic theorist, consider the statement ‘Victoria is posting a letter’. The dynamic theorist will analyse that in terms of tense. It is a present tense event that was once future and will soon be past. By contrast, the static time theorist will describe Victoria’s posting of the letter as later than, say, her writing the letter, and earlier than her walking home from the post box. This idea is captured nicely in an excerpt from physicist Paul Davies’ fictional interaction between a physicist and a sceptic, written in 1983:

[Physicist:] By giving date labels to all events, we can describe everything in the world without recourse to dubious constructions like past, present, and future.

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<sup>436</sup> See: Thomas M. Crisp, ‘Presentism’, in: Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (Oxford, 2003), §2.4.1.

<sup>437</sup> Tom Stoneham, ‘Time and Truth: The Presentism-Eternalism Debate’, *Philosophy* 84:328 (2009), 201-18.

<sup>438</sup> On this metaphor in Bergson, see: Andreas Vrahimis, *Bergsonism and the History of Analytic Philosophy* (Cham, 2022), 69.

Sceptic: But 1997 *is* in the future. It hasn't happened yet. Your date system ignores a crucial aspect of time: namely, its flow.

Physicist: What do you mean '1997 is the future'? It is the past of 1998.

Sceptic: But it's not 1998 *now*.

[...]

Physicist: Then all you are saying is that 1997 is in the future of 1983, but in the past of 1998. I don't deny that. It is precisely what my dating system describes. Nothing more.

So you see, your talk about the past and future is unnecessary, after all.<sup>439</sup>

This static theory of time, as Davies' dialogue indicates, was and remains the dominant view among physicists and philosophers of time.<sup>440</sup> Although the dynamic view (specifically, presentism) has been experiencing somewhat a sluggish renaissance since the 1990s, the static view's convenience for scientists since Albert Einstein makes it difficult to topple as it comforts with developments in cosmology and theoretical physics. Indeed, its philosophical plausibility is well-established too. While it ascended with the rise of cosmology in the early twentieth century, coupled with developments in tense semantics, the eternalist theory has historical pedigree. For example, St. Anselm's can reasonably be construed as an eternalist,<sup>441</sup> though this has been eruditely challenged by Brian Leftow.<sup>442</sup>

## II. On Thomas and Time

Recall that Thomas Aquinas rejected the Newtonian conception of God's eternity as a sort of infinite time. He subscribed to Boethius' Aristotelian notion of eternity as permanent and

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<sup>439</sup> Paul Davies, *God and New Physics* (London, 1990), 128-29.

<sup>440</sup> Ned Markosian, 'Meaning in Life and the Nature of Time', in: Iddo Landau (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Meaning in Life* (New York, 2022), 190.

<sup>441</sup> For an advocate of this view, see Katherin A. Rogers: 'Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God'. *Faith and Philosophy* 24:1 (2007), 3-27; and Katherin A. Rogers, 'Back to Eternalism: A Response to Leftow's "Anselmian Presentism"', *Faith and Philosophy* 26:3 (2009), 320-38.

<sup>442</sup> Brian Leftow, 'Anselmian Presentism,' *Faith and Philosophy* 26:3 (2009), 297-319.



unchanging, whereas time lacks such immutability.<sup>443</sup> Central to time, for Aquinas, is this idea that time involves change, a concept that has pervaded Western philosophy ever since. For our purposes, I take it as a matter of definition that time involves change. In a 1969 article, Sydney Shoemaker challenged “the widely held view that the passage of time necessarily involves change in such a way that there cannot be an interval of time in which there are no changes whatsoever.”<sup>444</sup> Shoemaker’s argument merits consideration but ultimately misses the point. He imagines three hypothetical regions, A, B, and C, that separated but visible from each other. If the regions were to freeze (that is, all processes halted yet time still ticked on) in a certain sequence, the regions’ inhabitants “would have grounds for believing that there are intervals during which no changes occur anywhere.”<sup>445</sup> In other words, there is a possible world in which time doesn’t involve change, so the proposition that time necessarily involves change is wrong.

Shoemaker’s argument, however, is problematic. First, when thinkers like Aquinas argue that time involves change, that conclusion does not stem from an empirical observation of the world. It is taken as a matter of definition to demarcate it from eternity. In a word: if you had time without change, it would not really be time. This is particularly true for A-theorists for whom the passage and flow of time constitutes change in and of itself.<sup>446</sup> A B-theory would, however, not be able to offer this response because earlier than/after than relations need events which do not occur during the freeze. However, this objection to Shoemaker isn’t sufficient on its own, at least from a Thomist view. After all, if such a changeless duration isn’t time, it is unclear what it would be on the Thomist view because it isn’t eternity. There are two further points that might be made in response to Shoemaker in retort. First, what he describes might be more akin to the mode of *aeviternity*, the temporal mode experience by angels and such

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<sup>443</sup> *ST*, I, Q10, A4.

<sup>444</sup> Sydney Shoemaker, ‘Time Without Change’, *Journal of Philosophy* 66:12 (1969), 363.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>446</sup> By this I mean that it is incoherent to speak of the passage of time as changeless.

outside of physical time. Aquinas notes this mode is distinct from eternity and time (strictly construed) since it has duration but has beginning yet no end.<sup>447</sup> Second, more plausibly, we say that time involves the potential for change. If that is so, then even on Shoemaker's examples, time bears an important relation to change. It demonstrates that, *contra* Shoemaker, time is not so easy to demarcate from change.

Second, Shoemaker's argument doesn't get off the ground. As Erlantz Etxeberria Altuna has argued, Shoemaker's scenarios are logically incoherent.<sup>448</sup> In order to construct his argument, Shoemaker argues that time-dependent properties cannot be considered genuine properties that can be changed because they are akin to Nelson Goodman's concept of 'grue'.<sup>449</sup> Take, for instance, "*x* is grue at *t* if and only if *t* is earlier than 2000 A.D. and *x* is green at *t* or *t* is 2000 A.D. or later and *x* is blue at *t*."<sup>450</sup> For present purposes, we can concede that such time-dependent, or positional, properties aren't genuine properties and therefore cannot constitute change. The issue, as Altuna points out, is that Shoemaker does admit their genuineness implicitly in constructing his scenarios. As such, Shoemaker's argument requires him to presuppose that time-dependent properties are genuine, which falsifies his argument.

Given that time involves change, we can uphold that aspect of Aquinas' thinking. We can ask whether Aquinas holds to a dynamic or static conception of time. In this section, I argue that Aquinas must be construed as an advocate of dynamic time. This seems to be a minority view in the literature (for example, Craig and DeWeese argue he held to a static view of time<sup>451</sup>) but

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<sup>447</sup> Anthony J. Springer, 'St Thomas Aquinas', in: H. James Brix (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Time: Science, Philosophy, Theology, and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, 2009), 33-34.

<sup>448</sup> Erlantz Etxeberria Altuna, 'Time without Change: A Challenge to Sydney Shoemaker's Argument', *IJURCA* 4:2 (2012), 148-53.

<sup>449</sup> On Goodman's discussion, see: Nelson Goodman, 'A Query on Confirmation', *The Journal of Philosophy* 43:14 (1946), 383-385; and Nelson Goodman, *Problems and Projects* (Indianapolis, 1973); and Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Cambridge, 1955). A good analysis of the 'new riddle' is found at: Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York, 1993), 128ff.

<sup>450</sup> Goodman, *Problems and Projects*, 359.

<sup>451</sup> DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 151; and William Lane Craig, 'Was Aquinas a B-Theorist of Time?', *New Scholasticism* 59:4 (1985), 475-83.

Aquinas cannot be read as a static theorist of time without, as Jason Reed notes in his critique of Craig's claim, interpreting Aquinas ahistorically.<sup>452</sup> First, we will refute the claim that Aquinas was a B-theorist. We will then give positive reasons for holding Aquinas held to a dynamic theory of time.

Craig's argument for Aquinas being a B-theorist can be articulated as follows:

- (1) If the past, present, and future are all ontologically on a par with each other, then the B-theory of time must be true (on Aquinas' view).
- (2) The past, present, and future are all ontologically on a par with each other in the divine vision.
- (3) Therefore, the B-theory of time must be true (on Aquinas' view).

Craig is certainly right in regard to (2). His exegesis of Aquinas' notion of future actual existents seems to be correct. However, (1) needs further exposition to be properly assessed and Craig is somewhat quick in his analysis. Craig offers the following remarks:

Accordingly, Thomas held to a B-theory of time. Nevertheless, I find it inconceivable that he consciously adhered to such a theory of time. For him becoming was not mind-dependent, but real, and it was only because of God's eternal being that all things were present to Him. Aquinas seemed to hold both to a dynamical view of time and to the actual existence of all temporal things for God in eternity. Despite this, however, I must admit that I can only make sense of Aquinas' position on God's foreknowledge and future contingents by interpreting him as proponent of the B-theory of time.<sup>453</sup>

For Craig, then, Aquinas must have been bound to a B-theory of time because he held that, for God, all events – whatever their tense – are equally ontologically on par in relation to God.

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<sup>452</sup> Jason Lawrence Reed, 'The Temporal "Presentness" to Divine Eternity in Thomas Aquinas', in: Gyula Klima and Alexander W. Hall (eds.), *Categories and What is Beyond*, II, (Newcastle, 2011), 99-112.

<sup>453</sup> Craig, 'Was Aquinas a B-theorist?', 483.

There is no actualization or temporal becoming, and any sense of tense is illusory. In this claim, Craig is not alone, generally for more philosophical than exegetical reasons. The claim that timelessness requires a B-theory of time has found defenders in Paul Helm and Alan Padgett.<sup>454</sup>

The first but more minor of the objections to Craig's view is that, by his own admission, it is deeply anachronistic. Aquinas, as our exposition of his view showed, had no sense of McTaggart's terminology or theoretical framework. That is not to say it does not fit (though we will) but that such a retroactive application of a McTaggart's conceptual apparatus is likely to obscure more than elucidate. Craig presumably thinks that such anachronism sheds light on Aquinas' thought by casting Aquinas' scholasticism in contemporary analytic style, but as literary scholar Brian Vickers was wont to note: "Anachronism distorts the past to suit the whims of the present."<sup>455</sup>

Indeed, the potential for distortion is evidence in our case. Take the conditional premise in our formulation of Craig's argument:

- (1) If the past, present, and future are all ontologically on a par with each other, then the B-theory of time must be true (on Aquinas' view).

The antecedent here is a claim that Aquinas endorses but the relation with the consequent does not hold for at least three reasons.

Firstly, Craig seems to misunderstand the implications of the definition of the B-theory he offered. Recall that he wrote: "the relation between events of earlier than or later than sufficiently captures the essence of time."<sup>456</sup> On the B-theory, time is real, but events are

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<sup>454</sup> See: Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford, 1988); and Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, 1992).

<sup>455</sup> Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford, 2002), 541.

<sup>456</sup> Craig, 'Aquinas', 475.

tenseless. God experiences events tenselessly but what Craig overlooks is that such events are tenseless within a time series. In other words, the B-theory provides an account of tenseless events *in time*. As such, we can grant that Craig is surely correct to hold that all events – whatever their tense – are equally ontologically on par in relation to God (i.e., God has a Boethian experience of events). However, what Craig omits is that, from Aquinas’ perspective, the major relevant distinction is not between tense and tenseless as ways of analyzing time, but time and eternity. It seems that Craig has erroneously inferred that tenselessness implies timelessness when, on McTaggart’s model, it only implies temporal parity.

The obvious response for the thinker of Craig’s persuasion (i.e., who holds Aquinas was a B-theorist) is to argue that if events are tenseless, then – contrary to McTaggart’s claim – the B-theory is not fundamentally temporal. That is to say, the fact that events are ontologically on par implies not temporal parity but atemporal parity. For example, to say that the past, present, and future are equally present to God is not to say they are equally present to Him on a time-series, but present to Him apart from time. However, if this is the route such thinkers wish to take, and I think it more accurately reflects Aquinas’ thinking on time, then they have to abandon McTaggart’s framework because that implies temporality. The B-series, as McTaggart envisions it, is a description of time series, not a rejection of time.

Secondly, it is somewhat inexplicable as to why, after Aquinas has exhausted himself distinguishing *tempus* and *aeternum*, we ought to focus exclusively on different and again anachronistic conceptions of *tempus*. In a later work, Craig himself distinguishes between these two quite fundamentally.<sup>457</sup> The obvious reason for Craig’s claim seems to be that he conceives of eternity as kind of timeless time-line, and I grant that Aquinas’ circle illustration does risk implying this. He writes: “Here becoming and being are contrasted in such a way as to suggest

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<sup>457</sup> See: William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity, Exploring God’s Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, 2001).

that from God's perspective the whole time-line has being timelessly.”<sup>458</sup> In one sense, this is a plausible reading of Aquinas, for a timeless time-line can presumably be one that lacks any change, except perhaps Cambridge changes in the psychological states of God.<sup>459</sup> However, to import the terminology of a time-line to express a timeless mode of being involving no motion is to breakdown precisely the kind of demarcation between time and eternity that Aquinas sought to outline, just as the terminology of B-theory does. This may seem to be a rather inconsequential semantic dispute but it is nonetheless important not to cloud the carefully crafted distinctions Aquinas draws by using terms that he would have regarded as oxymoronic (i.e. a timeless time-line).

Thirdly, and most importantly, is that Craig's analysis collapses the metaphysical structures that Aquinas erects. For Aquinas, God exists in the eternal mode, whereas the created order exists in the temporal mode. However, when Craig attempts to assign a theory of time to Aquinas, he is rendering this distinction obsolete. For Aquinas, since time is a feature only of the temporal order, no theory of time can be correct *for God*. In other words, if Craig is right about Aquinas being a B-theorist, Aquinas can only be a B-theorist about the temporal mode of existence. To, as Craig does, formulate a theory of time based on God's mode of being is to simply miss Aquinas' point, namely, that there is not a straight-forward time-series that holds for God and creatures. It is an error to postulate a theory of time based on eternity because time and eternity are distinct. The claim that Aquinas holds to a B-theory confuses matters precisely because it does not distinguish between the divine and creaturely mode of being. This, of course, raises

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<sup>458</sup> Craig, 'Aquinas', 482.

<sup>459</sup> On this point, I remain undecided, though I am most tentatively inclined towards Peter Geach's view that all things are subject to Cambridge changes, though I would adopt the qualification of 'all' to denote 'all things that hold relations'. See: P.T. Geach, *Logic Matters* (Berkeley, 1980), 321ff, though this view has drawn criticism from numerous philosophers, including Craig and John Boyer (see: William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity* (Dordrecht, 2001), 73-75; and John Boyer, 'Eternal God: Divine Atemporality in Thomas Aquinas', in: Darci N. Hill (ed.), *News From the Raven: Essays from Sam Houston State University of Medieval and Renaissance Thought* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2014), 266.

the equal question of what Aquinas thinks about time in the temporal mode. Would he be a B-theorist about the temporal mode of existence?

The obvious point that must be stated, on pain of inconsistency, is that it is dangerously anachronistic to characterise Aquinas' thinking in terms he never thought it. Nonetheless, we can look at some the features of Aquinas' thinking. In discussing time, Aquinas imbues tense with an important role:

Things reduced to act in time, are known by us successively in time, but by God (are known) in eternity, which is above time. Whence to us they cannot be certain, forasmuch as we know future contingent things as such; but (they are certain) to God alone, whose understanding is in eternity above time. Just as he who goes along the road, does not see those who come after him; whereas he who sees the whole road from a height, sees at once all travelling by the way. Hence what is known by us must be necessary, even as it is in itself; for what is future contingent in itself, cannot be known by us.<sup>460</sup>

Craig correctly interprets this passage of Aquinas as showing that it expresses God's transcendence of time, though he erroneously infers from this that the past, present, and future's being ontologically on par to God entails a B-theory of time.<sup>461</sup> However, I posit that this illustration indicates precisely how Craig has mischaracterised the Thomistic view. Aquinas is utilising the illustration to again draw a contrast between eternity and time and, in doing so, he implies the reality of tense and temporal becoming in the temporal mode of existence. The man walking down the road experiences motion, a change in states. He experiences real

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<sup>460</sup> ST1, Q.3, A.1, ad. 3. (*Djicendum quod ea quae temporaliter in actum reducuntur, a nobis successive cognoscuntur in tempore, sed a Deo in aeternitate, quae est supra tempus. Unde nobis, quia cognoscimus futura contingentia inquantum talia sunt, certa esse non possunt, sed soli Deo, cuius intelligere est in aeternitate supra tempus. Sicut ille qui vadit per viam, non videt illos qui post eum veniunt, sed ille qui ab aliqua altitudine totam viam intuetur, simul videt omnes transeuntes per viam. Et ideo illud quod scitur a nobis, oportet esse necessarium etiam secundum quod in se est, quia ea quae in se sunt contingentia futura, a nobis sciri non possunt*).

<sup>461</sup> Craig, 'Aquinas', 483.

temporal becoming and tense. He was once further back down the road and soon, in the future, he will be further along. Aquinas' use of the phrase "we know future contingent things as such" (*quia cognoscimus futura contingentia inquantum*) lends support this interpretation.<sup>462</sup> Aquinas' view does not seem to be that tense is an illusory feature of time. *Sed contra*, Aquinas' view is more plausibly read as being that tense and temporal becoming as real features of time, properly construed. In that, Aquinas' conception of time, properly construed, is more approximate to McTaggart's A-theory – though, as noted, it is not sensible to apply such terminology. As mentioned above, this Thomist view implies tense is real, but that it is open. Thomistic presentism entails that, in the temporal mode, the future is not yet real in the same sense that the present is – so it is open – but that is not to deny the reality of tense and temporal becoming. After all, without the reality of temporal becoming, the future could not become real *qua* present.

Arguably, Aquinas could be interpreted as holding that past, present, and future, and indeed temporal becoming, are merely illusory if we grant that God does not experience them. In other words, if we grant God sees things *as they are*, the way things seem to be in the temporal mode are not how they really are. This objection has *prima facie* force but I am inclined to say such a claim is predicated upon a confusion. According to Aquinas, God knows the temporal mode via the eternal mode. He knows the future (temporally) *qua* present (eternally). Given this, it is implausible to say that the temporal mode does not really present things as they are for that would imply, under Aquinas' model, that God believes in an illusion, which is patently absurd. Moreover, in Aquinas' writings, we find no statement that coheres with this alternative interpretation.

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<sup>462</sup> ST1, Q.14, A.13, ad. 3.



In short, then, Aquinas cannot be described as a B-theorist and, in fact, His theory only makes sense when we hold that the eternal mode transcends any theory of time and that the temporal mode is better described as conforming to the characteristics of an A-theory of time, though it would be a mistake to impose McTaggart's labels onto Aquinas. If we describe Aquinas as a B-theorist, we bastardise the sophisticated division that Aquinas laboured to demonstrate.

It is quite possible that Aquinas was wrong to assume that the timelessness of God is compatible with an A-theory of time. Brevity precludes substantive discussion of that matter here but tentatively, I am inclined to say that contemporary philosophers have missed a point of which Aquinas was no doubt acutely aware: whatever time *is*, it has no bearing on the eternity of God. This may appear counter-intuitive but closer analysis reveals the logic. In delineating eternity and time, Aquinas guarantees that whatever we may think about time – and Aquinas, as noted, has his own views – it has no bearing on eternity; they are entirely different modes of existence. In order to assert that timelessness requires a B-theory of time involves a kind of relation between time and eternity that, so far as Aquinas is concerned, simply does not exist and *could* not exist. As we have illustrated in evaluating Craig's characterisation of Aquinas' view, the fundamental error is in formulating a theory of time based on the divine vision. Insofar as the Angelic Doctor is concerned, this is not only inappropriate, but wholly misunderstands the nature and importance of the distinction between time and eternity. While Craig is not alone in his view that timelessness requires a B-theory of time, Aquinas is not alone in his rejecting of this. Both Anselm and Augustine likewise rejected this modern fascination with not mixing eternalism and temporality (in the sense of positing an account in which they cohere rather than sit opposed), with neat and simple accounts of a world that is either tensed or tenseless, A-theory or B-theory.<sup>463</sup> That that end, perhaps contemporary philosophy of

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<sup>463</sup> On this see, Taneli Kukkonen, 'Eternity', in: John Marenbon (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford, 2012), 529.

religion needs to revisit the wisdom of scholasticism. As such, there's no good reason to suppose Aquinas was a B-theorist about time.

Further, there is good reason for thinking Aquinas held to a dynamic theory of time. As noted, there are compelling reasons to think Aquinas was a presentist. In fact, Craig, who holds that Aquinas was a B-theorist, admits this. Craig and James Sinclair have argued that Aristotelian thinkers like Aquinas “are clearly presupposing an A-theory of time and an ontology of presentism, according to which the only temporal items which exist are those that presently exist.”<sup>464</sup> This idea that Aquinas shows a proclivity toward presentism has also been capably demonstrated by Ed Feser, Brian Leftow, and R. T. Mullins separately.<sup>465</sup> When we look at Aquinas' epistemology, as in our earlier chapter, Aquinas clearly thinks of tense as an objective feature of the temporal world. For example, in *De Veritate*, Aquinas declares “God knows some things, namely, the present, past, and future, with the knowledge of vision.”<sup>466</sup> Tense is not some psychological constructive, but an objective feature of the world of which God has knowledge. Moreover, the present itself is the only state that exists in the temporal mode. The reason that the future is not determinate, for example, is that it does not yet exist (temporally). It is necessary here to do some draw a careful distinction between the temporal and eternal modes. Scholars often speak of Aquinas being a presentist when discussing the eternal mode. That is true. However, my claim is that Aquinas is a presentist in regards to the temporal mode too, but in a slightly distinct sense. Recall that Aquinas holds that in the eternal mode, the present alone is the only objective tensed feature. God knows the future of the temporal world *qua* present, for example. That might imply that God is purveying the past, present, and future of the temporal mode as though they are all ontologically equivalent. However, Aquinas wants

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<sup>464</sup> Craig and Sinclair, ‘Kalam’, 115.

<sup>465</sup> Ed Feser, *Aristotle's Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid, 2019), chapter 5, esp. §4.3.6; Leftow, ‘Anselmian Presentism’; and R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford, 2016), ch. 4.

<sup>466</sup> DVQ8, A4, reply.

to say that the present is the only *real* feature of the temporal mode too. That is why future objects are called non-existents, for example. The future lacks the ontic standing of the present.

Moreover, Aquinas is deeply committed to the notion of temporal becoming, hence his concern with time involving change. In his 1972 paper at the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association, Paul Fitzgerald distinguished between different types of temporal becoming. He identified a particular type of temporal becoming as “reality-acquisition”, the idea that temporal becoming is the actualization of potential progressively in time.<sup>467</sup> It is this sense of temporal becoming with which Aquinas is concerned. In the *Summa*, Aquinas notes:

For everything is knowable according to the mode of its own actuality; since a thing is not known according as it is in potentiality, but in so far as it is in actuality, as said in Metaph. ix.<sup>468</sup>

For Aquinas, then, the flow of time is essential to the actualisation of potentialities, which is also a prerequisite for its knowability. The reason creatures in the temporal mode do not know the future is, in one sense, that it hasn’t been actualised. It can be known *qua* potential, but actual knowledge requires temporal flow, for the states of affairs to obtain, so to speak. This too not only stresses the importance of the passage of time, but the primacy of the present. As such, I think it is clear that (a) Aquinas held to a dynamic theory of time; and (b) that he was more specifically a presentist.

### III. In Defence of a Dynamic Theory of Time

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<sup>467</sup> Paul Fitzgerald, ‘Nowness and the Understanding of Time’, in: Kenneth F. Schaffner and Robert S. Cohen (eds.), *Proceedings of the 1972 Biennial Meeting: Philosophy of Science Association* (Dordrecht, 1974), 260.

<sup>468</sup> *ST*, I, Q14, A3. Latin: *Est enim unumquodque cognoscibile secundum modum sui actus, non enim cognoscitur aliquid secundum quod in potentia est, sed secundum quod est in actu, ut dicitur in IX Metaphys.*

Having shown that Aquinas held a dynamic theory of time, it is necessary now to defend it. I intend to develop two distinct arguments for a dynamic conception of time: the phenomenological experience of time, and the use of tense in language. I will then, in the next section, consider common arguments against the dynamic view of time, including M. Joshua Mozersky's highly technical criticism.<sup>469</sup>

If the dynamic theory of time is false, there was no ghost of Christmas past, present, nor future. This may seem a rather odd point to make. Obviously, there were no such ghosts, other than in the mind of Charles Dickens. However, that response is revealing. When we dismiss the existence of such ghosts, we do so on the basis that there are no ghosts. However, for the critic of a dynamic theory of time, the existence of the ghosts must be dismissed for a wholly different reason: namely, there is no past, present, nor future. What I am trying to capture here is a pervasive intuition: namely, that our phenomenological experience of tense and temporal becoming provides *prima facie* justification for subscription to a dynamic theory of time. In other words, we should adopt a dynamic theory of time because it best comports with our experience. Craig has stated the argument thusly:

1. Belief in the objective reality of the distinction between past, present, and future is properly basic.
2. If our belief in the objective reality of the distinction between past, present, and future is properly basic, then we are *prima facie* justified in holding this belief.
3. Therefore, we are *prima facie* justified in holding our belief in the objective reality of the distinction between past, present, and future.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> M. Joshua Mozersky, 'Presentism', in: Craig Callender (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time* (Oxford, 2011), 122-44.

<sup>470</sup> Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity*, 132-33.

What I mean by ‘properly basic’ here is much in line with a modest foundationalism, much in the vein of Robert Audi and Alvin Plantinga.<sup>471</sup> It is the idea that our non-inferential perceptual, or experiential, beliefs are warranted *unless* an adequate defeater is provided. In other words, they are properly basic. If such a defeater is offered, then the properly basic belief must be suspended. To illustrate, consider this example, which I have adapted from J. L. Austin’s famous magenta example.<sup>472</sup> Suppose that one morning I look from my study window and glance at the sun-scorched grass in the garden. The grass looks to be brown, so I form the non-inferential belief that ‘the grass is brown’. I am wholly justified in holding that belief and regarding it as true. Suppose that later that morning, I stroll out onto the grass and sit upon it, noticing that the blades are not actually brown, but a straw-coloured yellow. In such a case, my original belief that the grass is brown is refuted by the defeater, the observation that grass is in fact yellow (and this latter belief holds great weight because it was derived from closer inspection). For the purposes of this argument, I intend to merely presuppose that this sort of foundationalism is true. This argument too would hold if a strong foundationalism that ascribes infallibility to basic beliefs were true but, following William Alston, I regard that additional assertion of non-defeasibility as an unnecessary addition to the foundationalist position.<sup>473</sup>

In the argument offered by Craig above, we should be able to see that (2) is true *ex vi termini*. The question, then, is whether belief in a dynamic theory of time is a properly basic belief. I argue in the affirmative, that Tim Maudlin is correct when he asserts that “[b]ecause the notion that time passes is common sense, it perhaps requires little positive defence; if there are no weighty objections to the view, it should be accepted.”<sup>474</sup> In support of (1), I argue that the

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<sup>471</sup> This view is outlined succinctly in: Dan O’Brien, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Abingdon, 2006), 72-75;

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 73

<sup>473</sup> On Alston’s foundationalism, see: William Alston, ‘Justification and Knowledge,’ *Proceedings of the World Congress of Philosophy*, 5, as: reprinted in: William Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca, 1989), 172-82.

<sup>474</sup> Tim Maudlin, *Philosophy of Physics: Space and Time* (Princeton, 2012), 259; cf. Tim Maudlin, ‘Remarks on the Passage of Time’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 102:3 (2002), 237-52.

presentness of experience and temporal becoming demonstrate the dynamic view's epistemic basicity.

In regard to the first contention, it seems evident that what I am experiencing is the present. In the words of Richard Taylor, it is a datum.<sup>475</sup> As surely as I know the world is real as opposed to the invention of some malevolent Cartesian demon, I know that the fact that I am sat at my desk is present (even if speciously so, to use William James' terminology)<sup>476</sup>. The drum of the rain on the window is present. What I am experiencing is the *presentness* of these events. This belief is non-inferential. It is a properly basic as my belief in the external world. As such, it seems that I am justified in holding it in the absence of a defeater. We can push this further too to support presentism. What we perceive is *presentness*; we do not perceive pastness or futureness. As such, our argument is not merely an argument for a dynamic theory of time, but a presentist one.

One defeater is to make a general argument against the reliability of experience; the argument just presented has been widely criticised by static theorists of time on the basis that it relies heavily on dubious experience. As philosopher of science Yuval Dolev has outlined it:

Experience is not faulty. But uncritical appeal to it may lead to unwarranted conclusions. Thus naïve, pre-critical common sense may tacitly acquiesce to the notion that “only the present is real” and mistakenly construe the ontology underpinning our temporal experience as consisting of A-facts, of a “moving Now” that renders ontologically superior to the events it visits.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> J. M. Mozersky, 'A Tenseless Account of Present Experience', *Philosophical Studies* 129:3 (2006), 442.

<sup>476</sup> On James' use of specious experience, it is cited and discussed at: Richard M. Gale, *The Philosophy of William James: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2005), chapter 10.

<sup>477</sup> Yuval Dolev, 'Motion and Passage: The Old B Theory and Phenomenology', in: L. Nathan Oaklander (ed.), *Debates in the Metaphysics of Time* (London, 2014), 33.

There is very little objectionable in the first two sentences of Dolev's claim. The foundationalist does not, nor should she, deny the fallibility of properly basic beliefs. It is *possible* that my experience has led me to form erroneous beliefs. However, that mere possibility does not, *ipso facto*, constitute a defeater. It is possible too that Descartes' fear that "some evil demon [...] used all his artifice to deceive me" about the external world be vindicated but that possibility alone should not convert me to solipsism.<sup>478</sup> As such, a general scepticism of experience does not constitute a good argument. Perhaps, however, this response is not sufficiently charitable. There does appear to be a risk of some sleight of hand here in treating the experience of presentness as almost perceptual. Even if the critic of this opinion grants that perceptual experiences are (or can be) properly basic, our experience of tense is not such a perceptual belief. Arguably, the argument that belief in the objective reality of tense is properly basic is more akin to the arguments that moral or theological beliefs are properly basic insofar as they are part of one's noetic repository.<sup>479</sup> That is to say, the proper basicity of such a belief is less obvious, *prima facie*, than the basicity of perceptual beliefs, perhaps to the extent that beliefs cannot be called basic at all. In other words, 'experience' is not sufficient to yield a warranted belief; such experience has to be perceptual, and our experience of tense is not. This seems to be a point that pricked D. H. Mellor's interest, though he never developed the argument in this way (as we shall see, Mellor takes the presentness of experience as a serious fact that needs explaining away). Mellor writes:

Suppose I am looking through a telescope at events far off in outer space. I observe a number of events, and I observe the temporal order in which they occur: which is earlier, which is later. I do *not* observe their tense. What I see through the telescope does not tell me how long ago those events occurred. That is a question for whatever

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<sup>478</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Methods and the Meditations* (London, 1984), 100.

<sup>479</sup> On properly basic theological beliefs, see: Alvin Plantinga, 'Is Belief in God Properly Basic?', *Noûs* 15:1 (1981), 41-51.

theory tells me how far off the events are and how long it takes for light to travel that distance.<sup>480</sup>

There are two distinct ideas in play. First, that we do not observe tense as present in any perceptual, and therefore, basic way. Second, that our experience of tense is inferred and, therefore, not properly basic. In regards to the former, the implication seems to be that since tense is not perceptually observed, it is not experienced (and, as such, cannot be the basis for a properly basic belief). The problem with such an implication, however, is that it looks to be false because it would rule out non-perceptual experiences providing warrant, such as mental or moral experiences. Even if I grant that our experience of tense is not perceptual (which I do not), it doesn't follow that it is not properly basic. It will likely be retorted that if I concede that the experience of tense is non-perceptual, it must be psychological, which is concede the point to the static theorist. However, this relies on an unproven and almost certainly erroneous inference that non-perceptual experiences must be psychological. The onus is on the static theorist to show that only perceptual experience, that is, sensory experience, can be the basis for properly basic beliefs. It would preclude beliefs such as 'torture is wrong' as being properly basic. In regard to the latter point that ascription of tense is inferred (which precludes the belief is non-basic), two points can be made in reply. Firstly, while what one is empirically observing in such an instance is not necessarily the present, our experience is nonetheless one of presentness. To illustrate, suppose I use the Hubble telescope to observe the MACSJ1149 Lensed Star. The look-back time for the star is approximately 9.34 billion years. As such, what I am observing is not the star as it appears, but as it appeared 9.34 billion years ago. Indeed, the star probably doesn't even exist anymore. As an OB Supergiant, it almost certainly died years ago in a violent supernova explosion, its remains now a black hole or neutron star. What I am observing does not seem to be present; in fact, I do not see tense. However, what I am

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<sup>480</sup> Mellor, *Real Time*, 26.



experiencing, namely, is present. That is to say, my experience of observing a long-dead star is present. The same holds true for Mellor's example. It is true that I can't 'see' the tense of the distant planet, but I still experience the temporal sequence as present. As such, a temporal elapse does not undermine the presentness of experience, nor its basicity. I may well infer facts about what I see via the telescope using my scientific knowledge but what I experience is non-inferential. The argument that I am inferring tense as opposed to deriving it experientially to form a basic belief is predicated on a confusion between the experience itself and the object of that experience.

The second point is that such an example as the MACS J1149 one is an extreme case. In fact, all perceptual experience is subject to the elapsing of time as the light travels to the perceiver. For example, crudely put, if I am stood 1m from my colleague, the light will take about 3.34 nanoseconds (that is,  $3.34 \times 10^{-9}$  seconds) to reach me. Strictly speaking, then, I can only observe my colleague as he was 3.34 nanoseconds ago. This elapse of time is so insignificant that it is properly considered to be part of the specious present, so we can be said to experience as a present event. The crucial point here is even if we grant, *arguendo*, the conflation of the experience and the object of that experience, and that in such experiences we are not observing tense (for if we were, we would observe it as past), it doesn't alter the fact that virtually all our commonplace experience is speciously present. The implication of this is that the overwhelming weight of our experience supports the idea that belief in the objectivity of tense is a properly basic belief.

We have now established that the belief in tense is itself properly basic. We can remain agnostic on the precise question of whether such a properly basic belief derives from perceptual or non-perceptual experience. Moreover, that belief is not derived inferentially. It is derived from our first person experience, which is always, present. However, our position is not yet secure. Later in the chapter, we will see arguments against the dynamic conception of time

that will function as proposed defeaters, but presently we can consider a more specific proposed defeater to the properly basic belief argument I have presented. Thus far, I have been using the idea of ‘presentness of experience’ and ‘experience as present’ almost interchangeably. This is because, in the words of DeWeese, “[t]he essential presentness of experience leads to a present-tense judgement about the experience.”<sup>481</sup> What I am asserting is simply that the presentness of experience justifies non-inferentially the properly basic belief that such experience is present-tense, which justifies belief in a dynamic theory of time. However, Mellor finds fault with this. He asserts that the presentness of experience does not justify the idea that his experience is present-tense. Mellor’s argument is, with respect, a quagmire but deserves consideration. For ease, I duplicate here DeWeese’s standardisation of Mellor’s argument:

1. Events are tenseless.
2. Experiences are events.
3. Therefore, experiences are tenseless.
4. Presentness is essential to experience.
5. Judgements about the presentness of experiences are present-tense.
6. Therefore, judgements about experiences are indexed to the time of judgement.
7. Indexed judgements have token reflexive (i.e. tenseless) truth conditions.
8. Therefore, judgements about the presentness of experiences do not entail that experience is present-tense.<sup>482</sup>

As we can see, Mellor takes real issue with this equivocation of ‘presentness of experience’ with ‘experience as present’. For Mellor, one can concede that one has presentness of experience, but that doesn’t entail that our experience is present-tense. By implication, in relation to our

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<sup>481</sup> DeWeese, *God and Nature of Time*, 32.

<sup>482</sup> DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 31-32.

argument, the presentness of our experience does not warrant the belief that tense is real. It is not clear as to exactly what Mellor is targeting here. If he is arguing that appeal to our properly basic beliefs about the presentness of experience does not itself entail that those beliefs are right, then that is hardly troubling for the present argument. The argument is not intended to prove the dynamic theory of time, but merely show it should be accepted in the absence of a defeater. A more elaborate and sophisticated variation of Mellor's argument has been presented by M. Joshua Mozersky.

Mozersky employs the argument that a tenseless theory of time can explain the presentness of experience. While Mozersky asserts that there are three individually necessary but jointly sufficient reasons to hold that the presentness of experience can be explained on a tenseless account:<sup>483</sup> first, our grammatical knowledge that 'e is present' iff e is simultaneous with the moment of time in which the utterance is given; second, that we are causally moved to accept present tense in response to perceptual stimuli; and we inherently try to maintain a level of coherence in our library of beliefs. I will deal with these in turn.

In relation to the first argument, Mozersky claims that:

[T]he cognitive significance of present tense beliefs is the result of, first, our knowledge of the linguistic rules [...] that govern temporal indexicals and, secondly, the employment of logico-semantic beliefs, such as the transitivity of simultaneity, that enable us to time our actions appropriately.<sup>484</sup>

Mozersky's aim here is to provide a tenseless account of temporal indexicals, which in turns shows that there is no need to appeal to tensed properties. Heavily inspired by the work of

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<sup>483</sup> Mozersky, 'A Tenseless Account', 446-49.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 472.

David Kaplan and John Perry,<sup>485</sup> Mozersky analyses tenses propositions in B-theoretic terms of simultaneity. For example, consider the proposition ‘It is now 2020’, which can be expressed equivalently as ‘2020 is present’. If this proposition is to be true, its truth implies that 2020 is present, which implies the reality of the present. However, Mozersky posits that ‘2020 is present’ can be expressed tenselessly as ‘2020 is present’ uttered at some time  $t$  is true iff 2020 if 2020 is simultaneous with  $t$ . This enables Mozersky to say that the statement ‘Now is 2020’ uttered in 2020 is logically equivalent to the tautology ‘2020 is 2020’. Moreover, it allows Mozersky to formulate other linguistic rules, such as “for all  $t$ ,  $t^*$ : ‘e is at  $t$ ’ uttered/thought at  $t^*$  is true iff e and  $t$  are simultaneous.”<sup>486</sup>

We will critique this account of language in a later section, but it is worth noting presently that it is unclear as to what Mozersky’s challenge is. It seems that Mozersky’s objective is to analyse language in such a way that it does not imply a commitment to the reality of presentness but even if he succeeds, that is hardly a defeater for the dynamic theory of time nor our present argument. The fact that we can analyse our natural language in such a way as to escape certain ontological commitments seems inconsequential so far as our argument is concerned. As best as I can discern, Mozersky’s point is just that our language does not inherently commit us to the view that tensed properties exist. However, for the argument as I have constructed that, that has no force. Even if it is true that our language does not provide us evidence for the existence of tensed properties, it remains true our experience provides us with *prima facie* justification for holding to the reality of tense. If Mozersky’s point is that the tenseless account of language, specifically indexicals, constitutes a defeater (at least in conjunction with the other arguments he deploys) for the basic belief that tensed properties exist, his argument does not go far enough.

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<sup>485</sup> David Kaplan, ‘Demonstratives’, in: J. Almog et al. (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (New York, 1989); John Perry, ‘Frege on Demonstratives’, *Philosophical Review* 86 (1977), 474-497; and John Perry, ‘The Problem of the Essential Indexical’, *Noûs* 13 (1979), 3-21.

<sup>486</sup> Mozersky, ‘Tenseless Account’, 449.

He would need to demonstrate that such tensed analyses are false. So far as I can tell, he only (arguably) establishes that a tenseless analysis is at least as plausible as a tensed one.

Mozersky's second contention that we are causally moved to accept present tense in response to perceptual stimuli is an intriguing argument. He writes:

[N]otice that present tense beliefs are not, in general, formed at will or randomly but, rather, in response to perceptual stimuli from our environment. One is taught not to believe that 'now is t' is true until one sees a clock face that reads 't', or until one perceives an event that one knows to be simultaneous with t. As we are educated we become the kind of beings who refrain from accepting 'now is t' or 'e is now' as true until certain perceptual experiences occur. So, the primary trigger for present tense beliefs is perception.<sup>487</sup>

At first glance, this is a rather seductive claim because is seemingly plausible but there is good reason for scepticism toward it (indeed, Mozersky is careful to avoid outright falsification by adding the qualifications of 'in general' and 'primary'). For example, imagine that you are in a sensory deprivation tank. In the tank, you are exposed to no stimuli that could trigger present tense beliefs. Indeed, suppose too that your circadian rhythm is so disrupted that you could not infer such beliefs from your circadian oscillator. In such a circumstance, one's present tense beliefs cannot be due to perception and yet we still have them. For example, 'I am presently existent', 'I am presently thinking about baryon asymmetry', and 'I am presently perceptually deprived' are all examples are present tense beliefs that I can form or possess even without perception. Subsequently, Mozersky's argument can only apply to a sub-set of our present tense beliefs. However, that aside, Mozersky proceeds to distinguish between 'present event beliefs' and 'clock-time beliefs', offering the following schema for understanding these terms:

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 450.

(PE<sub>e</sub>) (∀t)(∀e)(∀S)[(S is aware, at t, that e is present/ now) ↔

(i) (e is simultaneous with t and is the proximate cause of S's acceptance, at t, of 'e is now' as true)

Or (ii) (∃e\*)(e\* is simultaneous with e and t, and is the proximate cause of S's acceptance, at t, of 'e is now' as true)

Or (iii) (∃e\*)(e\* is simultaneous with t and is the proximate cause of S's acceptance, at t, of 'e\* is now' as true and S knows that e\* is simultaneous with e).

Secondly, clock-time beliefs: (PE<sub>t</sub>) (∀t)(∀S)[(S is aware, at t, that t is present/now) ↔

(iv) (∃e)(e is simultaneous with t and is the proximate cause of S's acceptance, at t, of 't is now' as true)

Or (v) (∃e)(e is simultaneous with t and is the proximate cause of S's acceptance, at t, of 'e is now' as true, and S knows that e is simultaneous with t)

Or (vi) (∃e)(∃e\*)(e\* is simultaneous with t, and is the proximate cause of S's acceptance, at t, of 'e is now' as true, and S knows that e is simultaneous with t)].<sup>488</sup>

The object of this distinction between present tense beliefs about *time* (clock-time beliefs) and present *event* beliefs is to provide a break-down of a tenseless, causal account of we come to have present-tense beliefs. Brushing off Thomas Nagel's objection that a tenseless account cannot tell us what time is the present, Mozersky writes: "(PE<sub>e</sub>/t) do [sic.], however, explain how we are able to know what time or event is present, and this is all that can be expected of an analysis of the presence of experience. To tell the time one must employ one's learned ability to use temporal indexicals in response to perceptual stimuli, but the content of what one learns

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 453-53.

is tenseless.”<sup>489</sup> In short, Mozersky thinks we can explain the causal process by which we form present-tense beliefs that are, in fact, tenseless. We apprehend tenseless facts but cognitively formulate these as present tense.

There is something rather suspicious about the argument just expounded. The first point to note, as with the preceding argument, is that this argument does not constitute a defeater so much as it offers a competing account for analysing the presentness which we experience in terms of belief formation. Indeed, if we apply Ockham’s razor in the crude sense of the simplest adequate explanation, his account is to be disfavoured on account of its additional complexity relative to the position I have defended.<sup>490</sup> The second point is this causal, perceptual emphasis. As noted above, there seem to be clearly present tense beliefs which are not causally and/or perceptually derived. If that’s so, it does seem to refute Mozersky’s argument. Mozersky, however, offers a pre-emptive response to this objection. If your present tense belief isn’t derived from perception of external events, it must be due to perception of either internal events or what he calls a “third kind of experience” (which I will not discuss here).<sup>491</sup> In regards to the former, he argues his account be applied analogously:

If the first option is what the objector has in mind, then I will run an account analogous to that presented above but for perception of inner states. That is, one experiences an inner event, *e*, as present if and only if *e* causes one to believe that *e* is now, or causes one to believe that *e*\* is now and one knows that *e*\* is simultaneous with *e*, and so on.

Indeed, I intend the account above to cover such inward perception.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>490</sup> This ‘adequate’ condition of the Principle of Parsimony is often overlooked. “Ockham’s Razor applies only on the condition that the simpler theory actually provides an adequate explanation for the phenomena that both theories aim to explain.” (See: Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel, *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Philosophy* (Nashville, 2009), 160.)

<sup>491</sup> Mozersky, ‘Tenseless Account’, 456-58.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 456.

The difficulty for Mozersky with this reply is that it seems to be rather *ad hoc*. Take the earlier example of ‘I am presently existent’. Mozersky’s claim is that the event of my thinking ‘I am presently existent’ is experienced as present if and only if my thinking ‘I am presently existent’ causes me to believe that my thinking ‘I am presently existent’ is now. The position is too contrived to garner plausibility. The reason, I posit, is that this causal talk doesn’t apply neatly to mental events. To return to the big picture here, recall that we are construing Mozersky’s argument as a potential defeater to the properly basic belief that tense and temporal becoming are features of the world. At best, his positions a competing account, as opposed to a refutation. Moreover, the analysis provides does not seem to capture our experience cleanly; it is a less plausible account than the standard dynamic view.

Finally, we can look at Mozersky’s claim that “[b]ackground beliefs, linguistic rules, learned patterns of behaviour and causal-perceptual sensitivity to our environments will combine to transform tenseless contents into beliefs with tensed characters.”<sup>493</sup> As I read Mozersky, his goal is to provide a story of how we come to hold beliefs with tensed characters, despite a tenseless metaphysics. On the face of it, such a project is irrelevant. If Mozersky’s point is to make the claim that we can falsify our tensed beliefs by sketching out how we come to hold them, then he is committing the genetic fallacy. However, I think that in this case, such an objection would be uncharitable, not least because the genetic fallacy’s extent of applicability is questionable at best.<sup>494</sup> I do not think Mozersky’s intent is to say we come to hold these beliefs in this way and therefore they are false; rather, his claim is these beliefs are false and here is an account of how we come to hold such beliefs. In defence of his claim that tensed beliefs are wrong, Mozersky draws an analogy to spatial and personal indexicals. The argument runs roughly as follows: the

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>494</sup> On this point, I think the fallacy is difficult to apply. Obviously showing how you came to hold a belief does not speak to the truth value of that belief but in the context of the rationality of belief in tense, it is plausible that showing that the means of coming to hold that belief is erroneous in some sense does undermine the rationality – as opposed to the truth of that belief.



inference to the reality of tense from the indispensability of tensed thought relies on the idea that temporal indexicals designate some monadic time like ‘present’, such that when a speaker utters ‘I am at the shop now’, for instance, he refers to something more than the speaker’s utterance being simultaneous with his being at the shop. Mozersky explains:

There is, at any rate, a fatal flaw in any argument that tries to use the ineliminability of tensed thought or utterances to argue for the reality of tense. The problem is that more is essential for successful thought and action than temporal indexicals; spatial and personal indexicals, as Perry points out, are just as necessary. However, we know that space does not contain monadic properties corresponding to such spatial tenses as ‘here’ and ‘there’.<sup>495</sup>

The point Mozersky makes here is that the justification for a dynamic theory could equally be applied to spatial (and personal) ontological commitments, such as that ‘here’ is a real component of the world. However, two points are in order here. First, the argument as I have formulated it does not rely on the ineliminability of tensed thought but rather its *prima facie* obviousness, such that it forms a basic belief. Remember our argument does assert the truth of tensed proposition, as such, but that one is justified in holding them to be true given their basicness. Second, Mozersky seems to be assuming that all indexicals are to be held to yield the same sorts of inferences. It isn’t obvious that that is the case; there are plenty of disanalogies we might draw between space and time. More importantly, though, I think the inference would be unproblematic in any case. Suppose we grant, *arguendo*, that we come to hold monadic properties of space as a properly basic belief. We can then say that that belief is falsified, such that we no longer hold to it, whereas our belief in tense is not defeated in such a way. Finally, it is worth noting that the argument hinges on space lacking monadic properties that are

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<sup>495</sup> Mozersky, ‘Tenseless Account’, 465-66.

designated by indexicals. I do not wish to deny that claim, but such a denial is a potential route of resistance for the dynamic theorist. In short, then, Mozersky, like Mellor, has given no compelling reason that constitutes a defeater, so our properly basic belief argument remains sound. It is worth noting that the argument hitherto expounded apply not only to tense but to temporal becoming. As such, the presentness of temporal becoming also provides justification for a belief in a dynamic view of time.

### *Language as Presentness*

Recall the earlier fictional exchange from Davies in which a scientist mocked the language of tense as “dubious constructions”.<sup>496</sup> Underlying this assertion is the view, which we saw also in Mozersky’s claims, that ordinary language makes use of fictitious and superfluous references to tense. As Bertrand Russell, the progenitor of what has been termed ‘The Old Tenseless Theory of Language’, said in 1918:

The occurrence of tense in verbs is an exceedingly annoying vulgarity [...] It would be much more agreeable if they had no tense, as I believe is the case in Chinese, but I do not know Chinese.<sup>497</sup>

Russell’s example of Chinese seems to be right.<sup>498</sup> However, by and large, languages do utilise tense. This fact requires explanation. Is the tenseness of language an indicator of objective reality or a rather annoying invention? William Lane Craig has argued the former.<sup>499</sup> There is merit to that argument but I do not think it is overly strong. I argue that it does not indicate

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<sup>496</sup> Davies, *God and the New Physics*, 128-29.

<sup>497</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (Abingdon, 2010), 85-86.

<sup>498</sup> Like Russell, I am not a Chinese-speaker but Mandarin grammar guides seem to affirm his claim. See, for example: Charles N. Li and Sandra A. Thompson, *Mandarin Chinese: A Functional Reference Grammar* (Berkeley, 1981), xx.

<sup>499</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* (Dordrecht, 2000), chapter 1.

objective reality, per se, but indicates the strength of the presentness of experience just discussed.

Gábor Györi has observed that “[t]he specific cognitive perspective language provides of reality facilitates our adaptive interpretation of our environment.”<sup>500</sup> I do not wish to defend the merits of a relativistic theory of language here, but Györi captures the fact that language reflects our perception of the world. That entails that a tensed language implies we see the world in tensed terms. As such, we can formulate the following argument:

- (1) If language reflects our perception of the world, we perceive tense and temporal becoming as real (because our language is that of tense and temporal becoming).
- (2) Language reflects our perception of the world.
- (3) Therefore, we perceive tense and temporal becoming as real.
- (4) If we perceive tense and temporal becoming as real, we have *prima facie* grounds for affirming a dynamic theory of time.
- (5) Therefore, we have *prima facie* grounds for affirming a dynamic theory of time.

This argument, then, constitutes support for our properly basic belief argument; our language highlights the basicity of such a belief. However, the argument can also be read as an independent inferential argument for a dynamic theory of time. Is it plausible? The most controversial premise is, as we saw above, (3). Since we have refuted that concern, let us consider the next most contentious premise, premise (1). One could, hypothetically, counter this premise by running a symmetry argument which argues that in such cases as language is tenseless, it reflects what we perceive as tenselessness in the world, which provides *prima facie* grounds for affirming a static theory of time. It is impossible to wrangle out of this argument by asserting there are no tenseless languages. Languages like Paraguayan Guaraní seem to be

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<sup>500</sup> Gábor Györi, “The Adaptive Nature of “Meaning as Understanding”, *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 52:2-3 (2005), 213.

genuinely lack a grammatical category of tense. Instead, the defender of a dynamic theory of time needs to break the symmetry between the arguments. In the case of tenseless languages, the most promising retort is to say that such languages are exceptions that do not reflect our perception of the world. This is not *ad hoc* for two reasons. First, we have already established that our phenomenology is generally one of tense apprehension. Second, even in tenseless languages, the absence of a grammatical tense is compensated for by the utilisation of other lexical items. For example, in the Eskimo language of kalaalisut, temporal designation with the same precision as tense is achieved using items such as prospective inchoatives.<sup>501</sup> As such, it appears that even grammatically tenseless languages are not tenseless in such a way that threatens my argument. Suppose such a tenseless language were to be generated, though. Would that constitute a defeater? Not necessarily. The argument presented does not require universality of tense in language. As such, either the ability to formulate a truly tenseless language or the organic emergence thereof does not seem to undermine the argument. As such, language provides justification for holding to a dynamic theory of language.

#### IV: Against a Static Theory of Time

If the static theory of time, the dynamic theory of time is false. In this section, I expound and refute the two main arguments for the static conception of time, that from theoretical physics and from the conceptual problems of presentism.

##### *Special Relativity*

In 1970, the late Wolfgang Rindler noted that Albert Einstein's pioneering work in the theories of relativity "would completely destroy the classical conception of time."<sup>502</sup> In the court of popular opinion among philosophers of time and scientists, he is certainly right – and with the

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<sup>501</sup> On this, see: Maria Bittner, 'Future Discourse in a Tenseless Language', *Journal of Semantics* 22:4 (2005), 339-88.

<sup>502</sup> Wolfgang Rindler, 'Einstein's Priority in Recognizing Time Dilation Physically', *American Journal of Physics* 38 (1970), 1112.

demise of classical time went the dynamic theories of time more broadly.<sup>503</sup> In his scathing attack on Aristotle and Isaac Newton, the late Stephen Hawking said:

[W]e have had to change our ideas about space and time. Although our apparently common sense notions work well when dealing with things like apples, or planets that travel comparatively slowly, they don't work at all for things moving at or near the speed of light.<sup>504</sup>

Hawking's target here is primarily the Newtonian concept of time, but it indicates just how radical the scientific developments in the twentieth century were in reshaping our understanding of time, moving away from a dynamic theory. First, I wish to highlight how developments have undermined the reality of a privileged 'now' and temporal becoming.

In 1905, Einstein published a landmark paper entitled 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies'.<sup>505</sup> In that paper, his application of Maxwell's electrodynamic theory undermined Newton's theory of space and time as absolute. Such a view, Einstein asserted, "is no longer satisfactory when we have to connect in time series of events occurring at different places, or—what comes to the same thing—to evaluate the times of events occurring at places remote from the watch."<sup>506</sup> Rather, Einstein was inclined to believe, both space and time are relative. In other words, the Theory of Special Relativity (STR) was born. Three years later, Hermann Minkowski, Einstein's former teacher, posited that the STR can best be construed as four-dimensional space in which space and time are inextricably intertwined as 'space time' or 'Minkowskian Space'. In the opening words of his 'The Union of Space and Time' speech at

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<sup>503</sup> Craig helpfully surveys the literature on this, see: William Lane Craig, 'The Classical Concept of Time', in: William Lane Craig (ed.), *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity* (Dordrecht, 2001), 105, fn. 1.

<sup>504</sup> Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York, 1998), 21.

<sup>505</sup> Albert Einstein, 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies', *Annalen der Physik* 17 (1905), 891-921.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

the 80<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the *Gesellschaft Deutscher Naturforscher und Artze* at Cöln, Minkowski declared:

The views of space and time which I wish to lay before you have sprung from the soil of experimental physics, and therein lies their strength. They are radical. Henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality.<sup>507</sup>

Over a century after being wed, space and time are still widely construed in Minkowskian terms. The implications of this are salient. While Einstein and Minkowski attacked *absolute* time, the STR, couched in Minkowski's four-dimensionalism, was taken to support a static conception of time.<sup>508</sup> Indeed, within a decade, Einstein had abandoned any belief he had for a dynamic theory of time (a belief that underlies in 1905 article), formulating his own relativist conception of the universe predicated upon a static conception of time in 1917.<sup>509</sup> William Lane Craig, expanding on Graham Nerlich's distinction, is careful to demarcate between the original Einsteinian interpretation of STR and the Minkowskian interpretation which Einstein later accepted.<sup>510</sup> I intend only to focus on the latter since only that theory can be said to support a static theory of time. How does it do that? Steven Savitt explains:

Pre-relativistically, the successive occurrence of global nows or presents constitutes the passage of time or temporal becoming, the dynamic quality of time that distinguishes it from space and that seems to be essential to its nature. The relativity of simultaneity challenges not only the uniqueness of the now but also our understanding of the passage of time as well. If each inertial frame has its own set of simultaneous events, and

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<sup>507</sup> Hermann Minkowski, 'The Union of Space and Time', in: Milič Čapek (ed.), *The Concepts of Space Time: Their Structure and Development* (Dordrecht, 1976), 339-51.

<sup>508</sup> Friedel Weinert, *The Scientist as Philosopher: Philosophical Consequences of Great Scientific Discoveries* (Berlin, 2005), 140.

<sup>509</sup> Albert Einstein, *Kosmologische Betrachtungen zur allgemeinen Relativitätstheorie* (Sitzungs (König, 1917).

<sup>510</sup> Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity*, 169.

if the principle of relativity states that no physical experiment or system [...] can distinguish one such frame or another as (say) genuinely at rest, then we are able to discern no particular set of simultaneous events as constituting *the* now or *the* present. If the passage of time is the succession of global nows and presents, then the notion of passage threatens to become unintelligible.<sup>511</sup>

In passing, I wish to note a peripheral point. Notice in Savitt's exposition, there is reference to physical experimentation. This indicates the logical positivism of scientists like Einstein. The underlying assumption in the STR has tended to be that the verificationist principle is true.<sup>512</sup> In other words, relativity was born out of a rejection of non-empirically verifiable claims, which entailed automatic dispensation of many salient metaphysical notions. The idea is that since no experiment could ever distinguish between such frames it must be taken that it is either false or meaningless to suppose there is a privileged now. I do not wish to assert that any inference from the STR necessarily is predicated on such verificationist presuppositions. After all, logical positivism is dead.<sup>513</sup> but any such inferences that are must be patently false because logical positivism, specifically the verificationist principle, is false.<sup>514</sup>

In any case, it is clear that Minkowski's interpretation of the STR lends itself to a B-theory of time by (like early Einstein) relativizing time and (unlike early Einstein) stripping it of its dynamic qualities by aligning it with space. If time were merely relative, we could rescue some sort of relativized dynamic theory of time, but Minkowski's four-dimensionalism essentially creates a problem for dynamic theorists: if time and space are unified, then if time is dynamic,

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<sup>511</sup>Steven Savitt, 'Time in the Special Theory of Relativity', in: Callender (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Time*, 551.

<sup>512</sup> Lawrence Sklar, 'Time, Reality, and Relativity', in: Richard Healey (ed.), *Reduction, Time, and Reality* (Cambridge, 1981), 141.

<sup>513</sup> John Passmore, 'Logical Positivism', in: P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, V (New York, 1967), 56.

<sup>514</sup> Brevity precludes a discussion of the falsity of logical positivism here but its self-refuting nature is discussed extensively in the literature. For example: Craig, *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity* 149ff; and Robert C. Trundle, *Integrated Truth and Existential Phenomenology: A Thomistic Response to Iconic Anti-Realists in Science* (Leiden, 2015), 19-22.

then space is dynamic. However, space is obviously not dynamic, so it follows that time is not dynamic. We can formulate the argument as follows:

- (1) If Minkowski's interpretation of the STR is right, then it follows that the static conception of time is right.
- (2) Minkowski's interpretation of the STR is right.
- (3) Therefore, the static conception of time is right.

(1) seems plausible enough. As far as I am aware, no compelling interpretation of Minkowskian space time has been able to reconcile it with a dynamic view of time. In my view, such a reconciliation is impossible. The question is whether (2) is true. Against the consensus of scientific opinion, I wish to assert it is not. I concur with Craig that a Lorentzian account of the STR is still a plausible possibility.<sup>515</sup>

Henrik Lorentz formulated the eponymous transformation equations that underpin the STR. For Lorentz, however, the theory should not be construed as a refutation of absolute time. In a 1910 discussion in Göttingen, Lorentz said:

If one connects with this the idea (which I would abandon only reluctantly) that space and time are completely different things, and that there is a "true time" (simultaneity thus would be independent of the location, in agreement with the circumstance that we can have the idea of infinitely great velocities), then it can be easily seen that this true time should be indicated by clocks at rest in the aether. However, if the relativity principle had general validity in nature, one wouldn't be in the position to determine, whether the reference system just used is the preferred one. Then one comes to the same results, as if one (following Einstein and Minkowski) deny the existence of the

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<sup>515</sup> I also hold that even if that is not the case, the appeal to STR conflates physical and metaphysical time.



aether and of true time, and to see all reference systems as equally valid. Which of these two ways of thinking one is following, can surely be left to the individual.<sup>516</sup>

By ‘true time’, Lorentz is referring to Newtonian absolute time but his more fundamental point is that three-dimensionless can, indeed should, upheld despite Minkowski’s contributions and that the principle of relativity does not necessary entail regarding all reference frames as equally valid. In other words, it is quite possible to interpret the science underpinning the STR and still affirm the dynamicism of time through commitments to the reality of privileged present. As Craig explains: “A Lorentzian theory of relativity is wholly compatible with the reality of tense and temporal becoming, since these are characteristics of absolute time.”<sup>517</sup> What all this entails is that if Lorentz’s interpretation is at least as plausibly true as Minkowski’s, we can dispense with (2). Is it right?

The crucial primary point to make is that there is no empirical reason to favour Minkowski’s standard interpretation over Lorentz’s theory of aether (which may be regarded as either another interpretation of STR or a competing theory). Lorentz’s view has, despite its unpopularity with scientists, has not only evaded falsification, but is empirically equivalent to the standard view of the STR in that it makes the same observational predictions.<sup>518</sup> As such, to affirm (2), the static theorist of time either has to show that Minkowski’s view is either more empirically justified than the aether theory or show that the former is preferable on some non-empirical grounds. A recent and influential paper explains that by using phase compensated optical links to improve the statistical resolution of atomic clocks spatially distanced over

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<sup>516</sup> As quoted at: William Lane Craig, ‘The Metaphysics of Special Relativity: Three Views’, in: William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith (eds.), *Einstein, Relativity, and Absolute Simultaneity* (Abingdon, 2008), 14.

<sup>517</sup> Note: Lorentz’s view has often been considered as an alternative theory of the STR rather than an interpretation thereof.

<sup>518</sup> Pablo Acuña argues that this equivalent degree of predictability is not sufficient to constitute empirical equivalence (see: Pablo Acuña, ‘On the Empirical Equivalence Between Special Relativity and Lorentz’s Ether Theory’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 46 (2014), 283-302). I disagree with his claim as it defies standard conceptions of empirical equivalence in the philosophy of science, so much so that it is a fringe view.

thousands of miles, we are routinely improving our empirical evidence for the STR.<sup>519</sup> This is often construed as evidence for Minkowski's interpretation but is, in fact, wholly consistent with Lorentz's view.

Pablo Acuña, the foremost Chilean philosopher of science, has taken the view that the two are not empirically equivalent. Rather, expanding on the important work of Larry Laudén and Jarret Leplin (jointly) and Richard Boyd (individually) in the 1970s, he argues that the standard view of the STR is to be preferred on the basis on non-consequential empirical evidence.<sup>520</sup> For brevity, I will only consider the argument he adapts from Boyd. Acuña writes:

From Boyd [...] we can extract a general principle of empirical evidence. Given two empirically equivalent theories, the corpus of accepted, well-confirmed background knowledge might be (or become) at odds with the theoretical core of one of the two theories, but (remain) coherent with the other one. The friction between accepted background knowledge, or, more precisely, between the experimental evidence that supports background knowledge and the theoretical-core of one of the predictively equivalent theories can count as empirical, non-consequential evidence to reject such theory.<sup>521</sup>

Acuña is essentially expounding a sort of coherentism which claims that if there are two empirically equivalent theories, the preferable one is the one best coheres with our empirical background knowledge. The question, he argues, is whether Lorentz's view sits uncomfortably with the background knowledge. Acuña formulates the following argument:

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<sup>519</sup> William Bowden, Alvise Vianello, Ian R. Hill, Marco Schioppo, and Richard Hobson, 'Improving the Q Factor of an Optical Atomic Clock Using Quantum Nondemolition Measurement', *Physics Review X* 10:4 (2020), 41-52.

<sup>520</sup> Acuña, 'On the Empirical Equivalence', 283-302; cf. Larry Laudén and Jarret Leplin, 'Empirical Equivalence and Underdetermination', *Journal of Philosophy* 88 (1991), 449-72; and Richard Boyd, 'Underdetermination and a Causal Theory of Evidence', *Notis* (1973), 1-12.

<sup>521</sup> Acuña, 'On the Empirical Equivalence', 298.

- (1) Aether theory is based on classic electrodynamics, particularly Maxwell's equations.
- (2) Quantum mechanics sits in tension with classic electrodynamics.
- (3) Therefore, aether theory sits in tension with our background knowledge (of quantum mechanics).
- (4) Quantum mechanics does not sit in tension with Minkowski's view.
- (5) Therefore, assuming the principle of confirmation stated above, Minkowski's view is to be preferred.<sup>522</sup>

What are we to make of this? In relation to (2), Acuña explains:

It was eventually realized that Lorentz's electrodynamic model of the electron was essentially incompatible with the new physics of the quantum. This recognition, in turn, worked as one of the main reasons why Lorentz's theory was abandoned [...]<sup>523</sup>

With respect to Acuña's claim, it is not obvious that Lorentz's view on the nature of time is fundamentally predicated on his model of the electron. That is to say, the fact that Lorentz's model of the electron was falsified does not necessarily invalidate those other aspects of his theory that pertain to and have implications for time, so far as I can see. The second point is that while the principle of confirmation is applicable *mutatis mutandis*, it is unhelpful here. Suppose we concede for a moment that the Lorentzian view sits less neatly with our background knowledge about quantum theory than the standard model. There still exists the question of whether Lorentz's view fits better with other background knowledge. I posit that it does. First, as noted earlier, the dynamic conception of time, which is compatible with a Lorentzian interpretation, is supported by the phenomenology of our experience, which is empirical. In that, we have an example in which the principle of confirmation proposed

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<sup>522</sup> The paper does not use this specific terminology.

<sup>523</sup> Acuña, 'On the Empirical Equivalence', 298.

supports the dynamic view. Second, as Harvey Brown and Oliver Pooley have eruditely argued, the Minkowsian view lacks explanatory power in relation to the Lorentz covariance of dynamical laws pertaining to matter.<sup>524</sup> If that is correct, we have another example of a case where the Lorentzian view might cohere better with our broader knowledge. As such, even if we accept the principle of confirmation, it is unclear that it supports a Minkowsian view.

In conclusion, the Lorentzian interpretation of the STR is, despite its lack of popularity, is a viable alternative to the standard view. As such, we cannot conclude that the Special Theory of Relativity necessarily supports a static theory of time. At best, it is indeterminate.

### *Presentism*

As indicated earlier, we want to affirm in particular a presentist account of the dynamic theory.

In a chapter entitled ‘Presentism’, Mozersky presents the following argument:

- (1) There exist determinately true and false propositions about the past.
- (2) Truth supervenes on what exists.
- (3) What exists in the present underdetermines what is true in the past.
- (4) All and only that which is present exists.
- (5) Therefore, there are no determinately true or false propositions about the past.<sup>525</sup>

Interestingly, most philosophers defending presentism have attempted to undermine (3). I think, *contra* Mozersky, that such a move can plausibly be made. However, I wish to take aim at premise (2), which Mozersky says “appears too plausible for anyone to deny.”<sup>526</sup> In a sense, that’s true. It merely implies the correspondence theory of truth’s recognition that truth derives from some correspondence with the world or, in other words, what exists. Indeed, it is not

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<sup>524</sup> Harvey R. Brown and Oliver Pooley, ‘The Origins of the Spacetime Metric’, in: Craig Callender and Nick Huggett (eds.), *Where Physics Meets Philosophy at the Planck Scale: Contemporary Theories of Quantum Gravity* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>525</sup> Mozersky, ‘Presentism’, 129.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

unlike the ‘Truth Supervenes of Being’ view that has been defended by Ludwig Wittgenstein and David Lewis.<sup>527</sup> However, the presentist is under no obligation to affirm (2). Instead, the presentist may affirm (2’):

(2’) That which is true is true because it corresponded to some state of affairs that did at some point obtain *as present*.

This assertion allows for determinately true or false propositions about the past because the truth of propositions is not contingent on their *present* existence, but on the fact that once existed *as present*. Indeed, this is somewhat similar to Mark Hinchcliff’s observation that we can know truths that do not supervene on anything presently existent.<sup>528</sup> In attacking Hinchcliff’s view, Mozersky rejects this for three reasons: (i) it is logically incoherent; (ii) it rests on a confusion; and (iii) it would lead to possibility to successfully referencing fictional entities, such as Santa Claus. For brevity, I will only consider the final of the three objections. On that matter, Mozersky writes:

Finally, reference to the non-existent allows for the possibility of successful referring to fictional entities such as Santa Claus. It then becomes hard to see what the difference is between what has existed/will exist and what is purely fictional.<sup>529</sup>

This argument has force but (2’) ultimately resolves it. Why can one make true claims about Frédéric Bastiat but not Santa Claus, when both no longer exist? The answer, as (2’) indicates, is that Santa has never existed *as present*, whereas Bastiat has. As such, it seems that (2) of Mozersky’s argument can be rejected. The presentist has no need to admit it and can readily account for true propositions about non-existents, as Aquinas himself was wont to do.

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<sup>527</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London, 1961), *passim*; and David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford, 1986).

<sup>528</sup> Mark Hinchcliffe, ‘The Puzzle of Change’, in: J. E. Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford, 1996), 124-25.

<sup>529</sup> Mozersky, ‘Presentism’, 130.

## V. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, we have seen that a dynamic conception of time is to be preferred, both from a Thomist (and Molinist) perspective [see other chapter for Molinist view] perspective and on its own philosophical merits. We have also shown that Craig's assertion that such a view of time entails a temporal view of God. Rather, we can hold that God is timeless but that the temporal mode is dynamic. In particular, we have defended a Thomistic form of presentism, particularly against criticism from the foremost anti-presentist M. Joshua Mozersky. We have found that our phenomenological experience and the language that emerges from it provides warrant for holding to a dynamic theory of time as a properly basic belief. We have seen that neither Mellor nor Mozersky's arguments constitute defeaters for that view. At best, they offer alternative views that lack the weight of experience. Further, we have challenged the overwhelming consensus that the STR supports a static theory of time. In fact, so long as a Lorentzian interpretation is at least as equally plausible, the scientific developments leave us with an indeterminate answer. As was noted, Aquinas' view does not require a dynamic or a static view of time, though he preferred the former. Rather, it has been defended here because it is true and because we wish to engage the fatalist objection, which has tended to be formulated in the literature with the assumption of the reality of tense.

However, what's critical to stress here too is specifically that the dynamic conception of time leaves the temporal future *open*. While the future is 'closed' from the eternal perspective, it is left open in the temporal mode, which makes creaturely freedom possible by allowing creatures to act otherwise. If the future were closed, if it were fixed and static, then creaturely freedom would be impossible as there would be no scope to act differently. Our form of presentism entails truth of propositions is not contingent on their present existence, but on the fact that once existed as present. Since the future has never existed as present, temporally speaking, it

remains open and non-determinative. The presentist view within a dynamic conception of time, then, preserves an open future that reinforces the framework for eluding the fatalist problem.

In his extremely scholarly and erudite *God, Time, and Knowledge* – and indeed a range of equally brilliant papers – William Hasker launches a two-fold attack on the doctrine of *Scientia media*, pioneered by sixteenth-century scholastic theologian Luis de Molina. In his attack, which consists first of three relatively minor objections and then what Hasker considers to be a knock-down “refutation” of the truth of counterfactuals of freedom, Hasker argues that the doctrine of middle knowledge, which is predicated on the truth of certain counterfactual propositions, fails precisely because these counterfactuals can either be true or counterfactuals of freedom, but they cannot be true counterfactuals of freedom since “[t]here are no true counterfactuals of freedom.”<sup>530</sup> With these counterfactuals of freedom proven untenable, it follows that middle knowledge – and consequently the Molinist solution to the problem of theological fatalism – must also be untenable. In what follows, I intend to demonstrate that Hasker’s three minor arguments, while brilliant, is fundamentally flawed and that there can be counterfactuals of freedom which are both true and warranted, at least insofar as they are the objects of the *divina mens*. I do not intend to cover his ‘refutation of middle knowledge’.

### I. The Structure of Hasker’s Refutation

Hasker’s argument can be expressed as follows:

- (1) If the theory of middle knowledge is correct, there must be true counterfactuals of freedom.
- (2) A true counterfactual of freedom must be both true and a counterfactual of freedom.
- (3) If a counterfactual is true, it cannot be a counterfactual of freedom.
- (4) If a counterfactual is a counterfactual of freedom, it cannot be true.
- (5) Therefore, from (3) and (4), there can be no true counterfactuals of freedom.
- (6) Therefore, from (1) and (5), the theory of middle knowledge is not correct.

To begin, both (1) and (2) ought to be accepted as definitional premises. Our issue of contention, then, surrounds the biconditional premise, expressed here as two separate conditionals (3) and (4), that a counterfactual’s being a counterfactual of freedom and being true are mutually exclusive. In this paper, I shall focus on his minor attacks, which I shall term the metaphysical argument, the modal argument, and the logical sequence. His more explicit argument for the mutual exclusivity is beyond the scope of this paper. However, before explaining Hasker’s reasoning, it is prudent to explain our terms.

The term ‘counterfactual of freedom’, and subsequently the variations thereof (e.g. counterfactuals of creaturely freedom), as conceived by Molinists, is propositional knowledge of the structure: “If person S were in circumstances C, S would freely do X.”<sup>531</sup> For example, if one knows that if Aristotle were tired, he would freely take a nap, then one is said to have counterfactual (of freedom) knowledge. The subjunctive conditional nature of such knowledge is imperative. What one knows is *not* that Aristotle will take a nap or even that Aristotle is tired, rather what one knows is that *were* Aristotle tired, he *would* take

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<sup>530</sup> William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca, 1989), 52.

<sup>531</sup> Linda Zagzebski, ‘Foreknowledge and Free Will’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 13/04/2017, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/free-will-foreknowledge/>> (accessed: 10/10/2019).



a nap – and that he would do so freely. This is what Luis de Molina famously termed ‘middle knowledge’.<sup>532</sup>

The term ‘middle’ refers to the logical position of this kind of knowledge in the divine intellect, according to Molinists. On this view, God has three types of knowledge, logically sequenced as follows: natural knowledge, middle knowledge, and free knowledge.<sup>533</sup> The crucial point to stress here is that this sequence is logical, not chronological or indeed causal. This point is often misunderstood by commentators, particularly proponents of Lewisian possible worlds objections to middle knowledge,<sup>534</sup> though this is partly due to disagreements among Molinists of analogousness between the logical sequencing of knowledge in the divine intellect and the logical sequencing of the instantiation, or actualisation, of the actual world.<sup>535</sup> For the Molinist, God’s knowledge consists in this tripartite division and each type of knowledge is necessary. For the Molinist, like the Thomist, “the objects of *scientia* are universal and necessary, there is then no element of contingency with regard to the claims of *scientia*, the axioms of geometry which Aquinas often cites as examples of *scientia* indicate the necessity which is indicative of *scientia*.”<sup>536</sup> In this way, the Molinist account transcends the Wittgensteinian notion that all necessary truth is analytic.<sup>537</sup>

Natural knowledge is God’s knowledge of necessary truths.<sup>538</sup> For example, God knows the sum of the numbers five and six is eleven. This knowledge would presumably also encompass knowledge of possibles since possibilities are inherently necessary and would therefore include what Aquinas termed *scientia simplicis intelligentiae* (though it is unclear just the extent to which Aquinas regarded these possibles as being<sup>539</sup>) and Scotus’ first moment of divine knowledge.<sup>540</sup> Middle knowledge is, as noted, knowledge of subjunctive conditionals of either possible or feasible worlds. This point is a matter of contention

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<sup>532</sup> Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1988), *passim*.

<sup>533</sup> On the Molinist conception of divine knowledge, see: Molina, *Divine Foreknowledge*, introduction, especially 47-69; William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents From Aristotle to Suarez* (E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1988), 173-78; and Eef Dekker, *Middle Knowledge* (Peeters: Leuven, 2000), 4ff [for Molina’s own formulation]. The bibliography here would frankly be too exhaustive to state.

<sup>534</sup> Such misunderstandings are well highlighted by John D. Laing. See: John D. Laing, *Middle Knowledge: Human Freedom in Divine Sovereignty* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 2018), especially chapter 3.

<sup>535</sup> For example, Craig thinks the instantiation is progressive. See: William Lane Craig, ‘Hasker on Divine Foreknowledge’, *Philosophical Studies* 67:2 (1992), 102f. This isn’t explicitly asserted by Craig but it is implicit in his analysis.

<sup>536</sup> Alan Terrance, *The Epistemology of St. Thomas Aquinas with Special Reference to Summa Theologiae 1a q84*, PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow (1997), 53-54.

<sup>537</sup> On Wittgenstein’s view of the correspondence of the necessary/contingent and analytic/synthetic distinction, see: Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century (Volume 1 – Dawn of Analysis)* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2003), 261ff. It is worth noting that this reading of Wittgenstein has been challenged, see: G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar, and Necessity (Volume 2 of an Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2009), 261ff.

<sup>538</sup> Molina, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 132.

<sup>539</sup> Aquinas refers to *mere possibilia*, which have nor will ever exist, but are nonetheless objects of God’s simple knowledge. See: J. J. MacIntosh, *The Arguments of Aquinas: A Philosophical View* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2017), 74; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, p.I, a.14, q.9. The edition cited here is: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Christian Classics Publishing: Notre Dame, 1948).

<sup>540</sup> William Lane Craig, ‘John Duns Scotus on God’s Foreknowledge and Future Contingents’, *Franciscan Studies* 47 (1987), 109. Craig likens it to Aquinas’ view, which entails it is analogous too to *scientia media*.

among Molinists. William Lane Craig and Thomas Flint, for example, separately that God's natural knowledge is God's knowledge of possible worlds whereas His middle knowledge is knowledge of feasible worlds.<sup>541</sup> This assertion is somewhat perplexing, but Flint explains:

A world will be feasible for God, then, if and only if it is a member of that galaxy determined by the creaturely world-type which God knows to be true. We can also say that a world is possible for God to actualize just in case it would have been feasible for God had a certain creaturely world-type been true.<sup>542</sup>

In other words, God knows all possible worlds in His natural knowledge, but His middle knowledge is knowledge of the sub-set of possible worlds He can create. I am myself unsure of necessity or utility of this distinction,<sup>543</sup> so for present purposes, we shall say middle knowledge is just God's knowledge of subjunctive conditional of the structure previously described.

Once a world is actualised, God 'acquires' free knowledge. Free knowledge, by contrast, is God's knowledge of the ontological composition of the actual contingent world, and this encompasses the past, present, and future. For example, God knows, by virtue of His free knowledge, that Maximilien Robespierre participated in *la Terreur* and that Pope Francis is a Jesuit.

This sequencing of divine knowledge is of utmost importance to the Molinist since, as Craig notes, "the Molinists, by placing counterfactual knowledge prior to creative decree [i.e. the actualisation of world], made room for creaturely freedom by exempting counterfactual truths from God's decree [...] so [...] counterfactual truths about how creatures would freely choose under various circumstances are prior to and independent of God's decree."<sup>544</sup> In other words, creaturely freedom is not undermined by divine foreknowledge because what one would freely do is not determined by God. All that is determined by God is whether to actualise the world in which one freely does whatever one does.

Subsequently, it becomes clear that the tenability of middle knowledge is integral to the Molinism defence of compatibilism, to use Hasker's loaded but preferred term. In denying the consequent of (1), Hasker is undermining the very foundations of the Molinist defence by positing an antinomie.

## II. Hasker's Metaphysical Objection to Middle Knowledge

Hasker's first argument is predicated on the question of what grounds the truth of some counterfactual. For example, what makes the counterfactual 'if a PhD student writes a sub-

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<sup>541</sup> William Lane Craig, 'The Middle-Knowledge View', in: James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (eds.), *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (InterVarsity Press: Madison, 2001), 123; and, more developed, Thomas P. Flint, 'The Problem of Divine Freedom', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20:3 (1983), especially 257ff.

<sup>542</sup> Flint, 'Problem of Divine Freedom', 257.

<sup>543</sup> My objection is not so much against the utility of the distinction between possible and feasible worlds. It might well prove to be of significant help conceptually. Rather, it seems that the distinction is at odds with the affirmations of omnipotence within classical theism, for it would imply that God lacks the power to actualise certain logically possible worlds, and the ability to do the logically possible is often considered the minimum of what omnipotence must entail. Now, there are of course possible worlds which are metaphysically impossible (e.g. a world with a necessarily existing cyclopes presumably fits the brief there), and that is perhaps a justified restriction, but talk of feasibility seems misplaced.

<sup>544</sup> Craig, 'The Middle-Knowledge View', 122.

standard thesis, she will not obtain her doctorate' true?<sup>545</sup> The standard Molinist response to this is that offered by Alvin Plantinga, namely, that the truth of such counterfactuals is basic and needs no further grounding. Plantinga explains: "It seems to me much clearer that some counterfactuals of freedom are at least possibly true than that the truth of propositions must, in general, be grounded in this way."<sup>545</sup> *Prima facie*, Plantinga's response has plausibility. To use the PhD student example, it does seem that such a claim is probably true, even it is difficult to ground that truth and explain what makes it true. However, this is not true for all counterfactuals. If we consider the claim that 'if the Prime Minister plays the boogie woogie on the piano, he will win the next election', for example, this conditional does not seem to satisfy the plausibility requirement expressed in Plantinga's allegedly Suárezian response.<sup>546</sup>

This intuition of the selective applicability of the brute fact defence of the truth of counterfactual underlies Hasker's critique of the Plantingan response. Hasker asserts:

In order for a (contingent) conditional state of affairs to obtain, its obtaining must be grounded in some categorical state of affairs. More colloquially, truths about 'what *would be the case ... if*' must be grounded in truths about what *is in fact* the case [...]. The truth of a material conditional is grounded either in the truth of its consequent, or the falsity of its antecedent, or both.<sup>547</sup>

To apply this to our examples, the reason the PhD example seems more plausibly true than a boogie woogie example is precisely that the latter is not so well grounded in what is in fact the case. There is ample evidence that if one does not produce PhD standard work, then one will be ineligible for the award, but there is very little basis in the actual world for supposing that a rag-time jingle will sway one's electoral prospects – at least not in any right-minded society. The question that Hasker is positing to the Molinist, then, is 'in what way are counterfactuals of creaturely freedom grounded, either in terms of truth of the consequent, the falsity of the antecedent, or both?'

It seems to me that if we take Hasker on his own terms, the Molinist project is doomed. One must concede to Hasker that *qua* material conditionals, there is no obvious way of grounding the counterfactuals. However, that does not mean there is no way of grounding them or that they need to be grounded in such a way. There are two promising solutions to the grounding objection to be stated here: the brute fact one, the positing of LCEM, and a Thomistic framework for grounding counterfactuals. These responses, which have potential for synthesis, seem to mitigate the potency of the objection.

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<sup>545</sup> Alvin Plantinga, 'Reply to Robert Adams', in: James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen (eds), *Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), 378.

<sup>546</sup> Hasker equates Plantinga's view with Francisco Suárez's (see: Hasker, *God*, 30), but matters are a little more complicated. Plantinga and Suárez both believe counterfactuals are true prior to, and independent of, the divine will (as highlighted by J. Martin Bach (see: J. Martin Bach, *Perfect Will Theology: Divine Agency in Reformed Scholasticism as against Suárez, Episcopius, Descartes, and Spinoza* (Brill: Leiden, 2010), 475), but as far as I am aware that there is no clear indication that Plantinga and Suárez shared the 'brute fact' approach to grounding, though Adams finds allusion to this reasoning in his concept of *habitus* (see: Robert Merrihew Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14:2 (1977), 111-12). I find the comparison contrived. On Suárez's view generally, see: Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*. Chapter 8, especially 220-223.

<sup>547</sup> Hasker, *God*, 30.

First, the Molinist is quite free to bite the bullet. The explanation that counterfactuals are basic – or brute facts – may not seem intuitive to Hasker, but it is nonetheless a logically coherent position. While true that many more speculative conditionals seem more difficult to justify, it is possible that God just knows them as true because they are true, without need for the ground in other truths that Hasker demands. As Craig succinctly put it: “Ignorance of an answer to the question [of what grounds the truth counterfactuals] demonstrates no incoherence in the position.”<sup>548</sup> Hasker’s question of what grounds the truth status of counterfactual proposition is philosophically interesting and may elicit a great deal of scholarly excitement, but the question itself is insufficient to demonstrate that the truth of counterfactuals cannot be granted, no matter how intellectually unsatisfying that may be. The onus is on Hasker not only to demonstrate that he cannot think of how to ground the truth (for that is merely an admission of his own psychological and epistemic limits), but to demonstrate that the truth cannot be grounded.

Secondly, on Hasker’s point that counterfactual truths need to be grounded in truths about actual states of affairs, this is hardly obvious. An appeal to the Law of Conditional Excluded Middle illustrates this. The LCEM states that if  $(p \supset q) \vee (p \supset \sim q)$ , where  $\supset$  – following Stalnaker – ‘ $\supset$ ’ denotes the subjunctive conditional connective.<sup>549</sup> This principle need not be accepted in all cases, but Craig suggests it is at least applicable to counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. For example, if Donald Trump were elected president, then he either would either post photoshopped images of himself as a boxer on social media or he will not. As Craig notes: “since the circumstances C in which the free agent is placed are fully specified in the counterfactual’s antecedent, it seems that if the agent were placed in C and left free with respect to action A, then he must either do A or not do A.”<sup>550</sup> This would refute Hasker’s claim that we must ground counterfactuals in the truth of actual world. Granted, at this stage, we are not dealing with the sort of counterfactuals typically spoken of, since we do not know which of A or  $\sim A$  will obtain in a given fully specified circumstance, but at the very least, it refutes Hasker’s general principle of the truth of counterfactuals. The appeal to LCEM does not demonstrate the truth of some specific counterfactual, rather it shows that at least some counterfactuals can be true, even if ungrounded in truths about the actual world.

A voluminous literature has been proposed on truthmakers, and Hasker has not provided an adequate defence of his account of truth-makers and their applicability to counterfactuals. However, I should be inclined to defend account of the truth of counterfactual which, in accordance with Hasker’s framework, grounds such truth in the actual world. What is it that makes ‘if Tom were to make a sandwich, he would eat it’ true? For Hasker, it is the conditions specified in the Stalnaker-Lewis possible worlds semantics.

On the Stalnaker-Lewis view, Hasker thinks counterfactuals are to be understood through similarity analysis (in particular, David Lewis’ development thereof), and to that end he compels us to think “in terms of initial-segment counterfactuals, in which the antecedent specifies a complete initial segment of a possible world up to a given point in time, and the consequent an event that may or may not take place at that time.”<sup>551</sup>

<sup>548</sup> William Lane Craig, ‘Hasker on Divine Knowledge’, *Philosophical Studies* 67:2 (1992), 97.

<sup>549</sup> Charles B. Daniels and James B. Freeman, ‘An Analysis of the Subjunctive Conditional’, *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 21:4 (1980), It ought not be confused with the closely related Principle of Conditional Bivalence.

<sup>550</sup> Craig, ‘Truth-Makers’, 338.

<sup>551</sup> Hasker, *God*, 32.

To better understand the Lewisian account, consider some possible world  $w_0$ . Suppose further that there is some set of spheres associated with  $w_0$  and that each sphere is a set of possible worlds. In other words,  $w_0$  has associated with it a closed set of spheres, and each sphere contains within it a range of possible worlds. If there is a sphere associated with  $w_0$  relative to which  $w_1$  is outside and  $w_2$  is inside, it would *prima facie* suggest that  $w_1$  is more similar to  $w_0$  than  $w_2$ . From this, Lewis argues that “a counterfactual is true if every world that makes the antecedent true without gratuitous departure from actuality is a world that also makes the consequent true.”<sup>552</sup> The point Lewis is attempting to make, crudely put, is that similar worlds must be just that: similar. Moreover, it is this similarity that grounds the truth of counterfactual propositions. Lewis explains:

A counterfactual  $\phi \Box \rightarrow \psi$  is true at world  $i$  if and only if  $\psi$  holds at certain  $\phi$ -worlds; but certainly not all  $\phi$ -worlds matter. ‘If kangaroos had no tails, they would topple over’ is true [...] at our world, quite without regard to those possible worlds where kangaroos walk on crutches, or stay upright that way. Those worlds are too far from ours. What is meant by the counterfactual is that, things being pretty much like they are – the scarcity of crutches for kangaroos being pretty much as it actually is, and so on – if kangaroos had no tails they would topple over.<sup>553</sup>

To return, to our earlier examples, what makes the counterfactual regarding PhD research quite true is that it coheres with similar possible worlds (that is, the antecedent would be true without any gratuitous departure from the actual world also makes the consequent true), whereas the example of the Prime Minister would be too far. In other words, the associated sphere in the former case is quite near, and the associated sphere is too far. It is rather a Goldilocks approach to our semantics. This is also the case for the cheese example.

Before proceeding to Hasker’s second objection, we should anticipate what Hasker might say in response to our LCEM objection. Given that Hasker is quite the Lewisian, it is probable that he would object to the invocation of LCEM on those grounds. Indeed, this is the ground on which most philosophers have rejected the LCEM as invalid.

Recall that LCEM states  $(p > q) \vee (p > \sim q)$ . It is important to bear in mind here that we are not talking about bivalence especially conditional bivalence, especially since – as we shall see – Lewis and Stalnaker seem to take difference stances on bivalence. Consider the following explanation to distinguish this firmly from the Principle of (Conditional) Bivalence. Whereas the LCEM is a *logical* principle, the Principle of (Conditional) Bivalence is a semantic one. Eef Dekker draws the distinction concisely:

CEM [Conditional Excluded Middle] could be stated as  $(p > q) \vee (p > \sim q)$ . Normally,  $p > \sim q$  is treated as equivalent to  $\sim(p > q)$ . However some take it that not CEM is false but a closely related principle, sc. The Principle of Conditional Bivalence (shorthand: PCB), is. PCB [Principle of Conditional Bivalence] says that every conditional proposition is either false or true. The difference between the former and the latter is, that the former is a law of syntax, the latter a semantic principle. CEM does not need an assignment of ‘true’ or ‘false’, but PCB does. CEM can be checked by mechanical manipulation of certain calculus, while PCB is connected with an interpretation of the formulae. So it is

<sup>552</sup> David Lewis, ‘Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow’, *Noûs* 13:4 (1979), 464-65.

<sup>553</sup> I should note that Hasker does rather conflate Lewis, but I have presented Lewis here as Hasker reads him – and conflates the three analyses.

possible to maintain CEM but to reject PCB. Truth-value gaps, in other words, do not demolish CEM.<sup>554</sup>

As Dekker highlights, CEM (i.e. LCEM) and PCB are conceptually distinct and can be separated out. The key difference is that the Law of Conditional Excluded Middle operates as a logic truth that is independent of the truth of the propositions involved, whereas the Principle of Conditional Bivalence is not. In more concrete terms, LCEM would not be invalidated by a lack of bivalence i.e. the presence of non-binary truth values) whereas the PCB would be. While beyond the scope of this chapter, this distinction can be seen in Supervaluationism, according to which laws of excluded middle do not imply bivalence. According to supervaluationists, border-line statements lack bivalent truth values. For example, ‘Mr Jones is fat’ lacks a truth value because ‘fat’ is border line; it lacks the definiteness to possess a truth value in and of itself (‘fat’ is a subjective term). As such, while it is bound by the LCEM, it violates the PCB – as would any propositions that are neither true nor false. It can also be seen in the Lewis/Stalnaker divide on possible world semantics, which we shall turn to shortly.

To return to the original point for now: The Lewisian possible world semantics objection attempts to refute the LCEM by providing a counter-example. Before expounding the argument, it is prudent to note that the Molinist does not need to affirm the LCEM as a universal maxim applying to all counterfactuals. She needs only affirm that it is applicable to certain counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Consequently, any counter-example needs to show it cannot apply to that specific sub-set of counterfactuals. However, let us state the objection.

It is widely accepted that on the first Lewisian analysis of counterfactuals, LCEM can be valid only if we grant two further claims: the limit assumption and the uniqueness assumption. Given the former plays no substantive role in the objection, I shall state only the latter:

[F]or every world  $i$  and proposition  $A$  there is at most one  $A$ -world minimally different from  $i$ .<sup>555</sup>

As Charles Cross notes, we can assert that in granting this assumption, LCEM must hold “for in that case there can be at most one most similar world to  $i$  in which  $A$  is true, and either  $B$  or its negation must hold at that world.”<sup>556</sup> Subsequently, to take down the LCEM, one must go after the uniqueness assumption, and that is just what the Lewisians are wont to do. Consider the following counterfactuals, the structure of which I borrow from Quine’s rather splendid Bizet and Verdi example:<sup>557</sup>

- (1) If Tupac and Bocelli were compatriots, Tupac would be Italian.
- (2) If Tupac and Bocelli were compatriot, Bocelli would be American.

On the Lewisian analysis, both these counterfactuals are false (though it is worth noting that Stalnaker, as a defender of LCEM, argued that they are indeterminate)<sup>558</sup>, but it illustrates that there are ties between possible worlds, that is, ties in the closeness of such possible worlds

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<sup>554</sup> Eef Dekker, *Middle Knowledge* (Leuven, 2000), 41, fn. 41.

<sup>555</sup> Stalnaker affirms the law, whereas Lewis rejects the assumption. See: Robert C. Stalnaker, ‘Possible Worlds’, *Noûs* 10:1 (1976), 65-75. This explicit formulation of Stalnaker’s principle comes from Michael J. Shaffer, ‘Might/Would Duality and the Probabilities of Counterfactuals’, *Logique and Analyse* 242 (2018), 120.

<sup>556</sup> Charles B. Cross, ‘Conditional Excluded Middle’, *Erkenntnis* 70:2 (2009), 175.

<sup>557</sup> W. V. O. Quine, *Methods of Logic* (New York, 1950), 15.

<sup>558</sup> Stalnaker, ‘Possible Worlds’, 65-75.

and the actual world in which we live. It is plausible that the worlds in which both artists are either Italian or American are more closely tied to the actual world than worlds in which both artists are, say, North Korean or Finnish. This would suggest that we ought to affirm that such ties exist, and this precludes the uniqueness assumption. This, in turn, would render the LCEM invalid. Cross explains:

[The LCEM] is invalid because the set of worlds most similar to *i* at which A is true could contain two worlds, one at which B is true and one at which  $\sim B$  is true, so that neither  $A > B$  nor  $A > \sim B$  would be true.<sup>559</sup>

If this is so, and is a worryingly formidable objection, then our appeal to the LCEM is looking rather perilous. However, without expounding an alternative account of counterfactuals here, nor offering positive arguments for the LCEM, but merely to offer a counterexample to Lewis' argument.

Such an example comes in the form of Tooley's critique of the similarity analysis.<sup>560</sup> If the similarity analysis is proven not to be an adequate account, then the objection to LCEM based on similarity collapses. Tooley's argument attempts to prove that if backwards causation is logically possible, then the Lewisian account fails. Now, I do not wish to address the question of if backwards causation is logically possible here, not least because I have yet to come across any definitive refutation of such logical possibility on a proper metaphysics and because Lewis concedes such a possibility,<sup>561</sup> but merely show that under that assumption, a similarity analysis possible worlds semantics is untenable. Tooley begins by inviting us to imagine some possible world, call it  $w_1$ , in which the only constituents are location and temporal moments, and that it has only two properties, call them P and Q, and these are properties that a location can have. Moreover, this world has only two laws, a forward (law 1) and backward causal law (law 2).<sup>562</sup> Tooley states these as follows:

(Law 1) For any location x, and time t if location x has both property P and property Q at time t, then that state of affairs causes a related location  $x + \Delta x$  to have property P and to lack property Q, at the later time  $t + \Delta t$ .

(Law 2) For any location x, and time t, if location x has both property P and property Q at time t, then that state of affairs causes a related location  $x - \Delta x$  to have property P and to lack property Q, at the earlier time  $t - \Delta t$ .

Now, we must further imagine two more possible worlds comprised as follows:

	Times	State of Affairs	-	Times	State of Affairs
$W_1$	t	x lacks P and x has Q	-	$t + \Delta t$	$x - \Delta x$ lacks P and $x - \Delta x$ has Q.

<sup>559</sup> Cross, 'Conditional Excluded Middle', 175. I have altered the notation here.

<sup>560</sup> Michael Tooley, 'Backward Causation and the Stalnaker-Lewis Approach to Counterfactuals', *Analysis* 62:3 (2002), 191-97.

<sup>561</sup> For a good discussion of Lewis' stance on backward causation, see: Ryan Wasserman, 'Lewis on Backward Causation', *Thought* 4:3 (2015), 141-50; and Bryson Brown, 'Defending Backward Causation', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22:4 (1992), 435ff.

<sup>562</sup> Tooley, 'Backward Causation', 194-95.

$W_2$	$t$	$x$ has $P$ and $x$ has $Q$	-	$t + \Delta t$	$x - \Delta x$ has $P$ and $x - \Delta x$ has $Q$
$W_3$	$t$	$x$ has $P$ and $x$ lacks $Q$	-	$t + \Delta t$	$x - \Delta x$ has $P$ and $x - \Delta x$ has $Q$ .

Remember that the two laws just described apply only to  $W_1$ . Now, we must consider two counterfactual propositions:

(1\*) If location  $x$  had had property  $P$  at time  $t$ , then location  $x + \Delta x$  would not have had property  $Q$  at time  $t + \Delta t$ .

(2\*) If location  $x + \Delta x$  had had property  $P$  at time  $t + \Delta t$ , then location  $x$  would not have had property  $Q$  at time  $t$ .<sup>563</sup>

From this groundwork, a rather clever move can be made. On Lewis' account, it follows that 1\* and 2\* cannot both be true unless we hold to the claim that  $w_2$  is more tied to  $w_1$  than  $w_3$ , and that  $w_3$  is more tied to  $w_1$  than  $w_2$ . This absurdity of this is quite evident. While Lewis isn't thinking of closeness in spatial terms, a spatial analogy is helpful to understand this absurdity. Imagine two gentlemen, Boris and Jeremy, are driving to meet their friend Jo. Imagine now that in tracking the progression of their journey, we say Boris is near Jo than Jeremy, and Jeremy is nearer Jo than Boris. It is a contradiction, and yet that is what Lewis' semantics yields. What this allows us to say is that Lewisian critique of LCEM fails, since the Lewisian account upon which it is predicated fails, and this allows us to utilise LCEM in defence of counterfactuals.

In brief, Hasker's grounding objection is undermined by the fact that it is not obvious that counterfactuals require grounding of the sort demanded by Hasker. Indeed, even if they must be grounded, they can be grounded in a way that eludes Hasker's specifications, as our appeal to LCEM has demonstrated. Moreover, we posit a Thomistic framework that grounds counterfactuals in a manner that aligns with Hasker's preference for correspondence theories of truth, but that does so without the gratuitous metaphysical extravagancies of Lewisian metaphysics. Subsequently, middle knowledge entails claims that either do not need grounding or can be grounded in non-Lewisian terms.

### III. Hasker's Modal Objection

Hasker develops a second line of argument that I have termed the 'modal' objection. According to this objection, counterfactuals of creaturely freedom must be contingent counterfactuals, but in fact "certain crucial counterfactuals should be regarded rather as necessary truths."<sup>564</sup> If such counterfactuals are indeed necessary rather than contingent, then it must follow that they cannot be the basis for a *media scientia* that has the primary function of preserving creaturely freedom.

*Prima facie*, this claim is a plausible one, though the picture we sketched thus far, particularly in relation to LCEM, might cast doubt on it. For example, it seems plausible

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Hasker, *God*, 32.



that the conditional ‘if Jesus were to be put on trial, Peter would deny him three times’ must be conditional, for if it were a necessary truth, then Peter’s denial of Christ would seem to be compelled.

Hasker develops his argument via appeal to Lewisian possible worlds semantics, which we have already rejected. Insofar as our rejection of such similarity analysis within the possible worlds semantics is warranted, Hasker’s formulation modal argument does not even take off. However, let us, *arguendo*, grant the similarity analysis. What follows? Contrary to Hasker’s claim that “if initial-segment counterfactuals are true at all, they are true in all worlds and thus necessarily true”<sup>565</sup>, Lewisian semantics do not behave such a conclusion. Alvin Plantinga observes that “[o]ne measure of similarity between worlds involves the question whether they share their counterfactual.”<sup>566</sup> What this notion of similarity would entail is that if we take two possible worlds, call them  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , whichever one of the two shares the most counterfactuals with the actual world (call it  $W_a$ ) is the most similar to the actual world. Given that Lewis instructs us to ground counterfactuals in the similarity between the nearest possible worlds, we are surely well within our rights to conclude that far from counterfactuals being true in all possible worlds, they must vary across possible worlds, and can therefore not be necessarily true.

To illustrate this, consider the following example. Take the counterfactuals:

S: if Mr Claus had stopped for a mince pies, Mrs Claus would have shouted at him.

S\*: if Mr Claus had stopped for a mince pies, Mrs Claus would not have shouted at him.

Let us assume we have two worlds,  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ . These worlds share an initial-segment – perhaps in that initial segment, Mrs Claus had warned Mr Claus that he must not have any mince pies since it would make him leaner and she is rather well inclined towards the muscular gentleman. The content of that segment is rather irrelevant so long as the content is identical in both worlds. This would entail that, on the Lewisian account, that  $W_1$  and  $W_2$  are equally similar, or near, to  $W_a$ , the actual world. Now, suppose in  $W_1$ , Mrs Claus shouts at Mr Claus, but in  $W_2$  Mrs Claus does not shout at him (perhaps he had brushed away the crumbs to conceal his wrongdoing). What this reveals is that the Lewisian account fails to explain whether S or S\* is true since it is not the case that the consequents of S or S\* are true in the nearest worlds to the actual world in which the antecedents of S and S\* also hold true. Why? The antecedent of S and S\* may be true in both  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , but the consequent of both S and S\* cannot both be true in any possible world. Since both worlds are equidistant in similarity terms to  $W_a$ , it means that neither S nor S\* can be true in  $W_1$  or  $W_2$ , though of course it could be that S\* is true in  $W_1$  and S and S\*, but this

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<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 35. The talk of initial segments is somewhat unclear but the gist of it is that it denotes some elapsed periods of time in a pair of worlds. Plantinga explains: “It is not entirely easy to give a rigorous characterization of this notion of an initial segment. It is clear that if  $W$  and  $W^*$  share an initial segment terminating at  $t$ , then for any object  $x$  and for any time  $t^*$  earlier than  $t$ ,  $x$  exists in  $W$  at  $t^*$  if and only if  $x$  exists in  $W^*$  at  $t^*$ . But we cannot say that if a thing  $x$  has a property  $P$  in  $W$  at  $t^*$ , then  $x$  has  $P$  in  $W^*$  at  $t^*$ . For one property Curley has at  $t^*$  in  $W$  is that of being such at  $t$  he will take the bribe; and of course he does not have that property in  $W^*$  at  $t^*$ . Perhaps there is an intuitive notion of a non-temporal property under which we could say that if at  $t^*$  has a nontemporal property  $P$  in  $W$  then  $x$  also has  $P$  in  $W^*$  at  $t^*$ . The problem of course is to say just what this notion of a non-temporal property amounts to; and that is by no means easy. Still the idea of a pair of worlds  $W$  and  $W^*$  sharing an initial segment is fairly clear; roughly, it amounts to saying that the two worlds are the same up to a certain time  $t$ .” (Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, 1978), 176.

<sup>566</sup> Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 178.

requires that we adopt a counterfactual analysis of similarity whereby similarity is established by the common possession of certain true counterfactuals rather than the initial segment analysis taken by Hasker. As Plantinga remarks: “from the fact that  $W$  and  $W^*$  share the appropriate initial segment, it does not follow that they are equally similar to  $\alpha$  [the actual world].”<sup>567</sup> Indeed, if the Molinist were inclined to accept the Lewisian account of counterfactuals, they could do so on this counterfactual analysis of similarity. They need not reject it as I have done. In any case, what this argument demonstrates is that counterfactuals are not true in all possible worlds and therefore are necessarily true.

This appeal to similarity between counterfactuals has drawn particular ire from Hasker who complains that such an account “violates the reason for introducing the comparative-similarity [initial segments analysis] in the first place – that reason being [...] to secure that counterfactuals are evaluated in worlds sufficiently similar to the actual world in noncounterfactual respects.”<sup>568</sup> I fail to see weight of Hasker’s concern here. First, as argued above, we have good reasons for thinking counterfactuals can be evaluated in non-counterfactual respects that do not require the initial segments analysis to be upheld. Moreover, the burden of proof is on Hasker to demonstrate that counterfactuals have to be evaluated in non-counterfactual respects. On the face of it, Plantinga’s account fulfils the same task as Lewis’, so the onus is on Hasker to find some deficiency within it. Timothy O’Connor has taken up the mantle on Hasker’s behalf, arguing:

[Plantinga’s] observation regarding causal laws is not enough to motivate treating CFs in a similar manner, since counterfactuals associated with causal laws are grounded either in the causal properties of existing objects (on non-Humean accounts) or in observed patterns of regularity, and neither of these considerations applies in the case of CFs.<sup>569</sup>

This objection is puzzling. The claim seems to be that Plantinga is treating counterfactuals in the same manner as causal laws but this is unwarranted. The reason this objection is puzzling is that Plantinga makes no such claim. He argues that causal laws are said to imply or entail counterfactuals but that does not entail that counterfactuals and causal laws are treated in the same manner. Plantinga is merely saying that the truth of counterfactuals can be determined by causal (by which, I presume Plantinga means nomological laws). For example, it is true that if I were to eject myself from a plane without a parachute above land, I would meet the earth with organ-splattering force). If this is the point with which O’Connor takes issue, it is unclear precisely what the issue is. Is O’Connor’s issue that in grounding counterfactuals in such laws, Plantinga is admitting the similarity should be assessed in terms of comparative similarity between states of affairs between possible worlds? If so, O’Connor seems to miss Plantinga’s point altogether. His point is not that such laws are irrelevant. Rather, his claim is that differences in comparative similarity can be analysed in terms of counterfactual similarity. He writes:

[I]nstead of denigrating  $W'$  on the grounds that its laws differ from  $\alpha$ ’s, we might as well have complained, in view of the above connection, that  $W'$  lacks some of  $\alpha$ ’s counterfactuals.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>568</sup> Hasker, *God*, 35-36.

<sup>569</sup> Timothy O’Connor, ‘The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge’, *Philosophical Studies* 66:2 (1991), 149.

<sup>570</sup> Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 178.

O'Connor's complaint that Plantinga takes natural, nomological laws into consideration seems without thrust, for Plantinga's point is not that consideration of such laws and comparative similarities is irrelevant, but they are better stated in terms of counterfactual similarity. That is to say, such laws are at least as applicable to counterfactual similarity as they are to comparative similarity, but on the whole the former account is to be preferred. Subsequently, O'Connor's defence of Hasker seems to miss the mark.

As noted earlier, we do not need to accept a possible worlds semantics of counterfactuals whatsoever but if we do, it has become clear that the Plantingan model provides a serious and plausible metaphysical foundation for the Molinist. This, of course, raises the question of whether our earlier Thomistic account of counterfactuals is to be preferred to the Plantingan model. The Molinist can opt for either, but it seems to me that the Thomistic account is to be preferred as the simpler explanation. However, while it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully expound such an account, it seems that the Plantingan model and the Thomistic model are reconcilable if postulate that God's divine presentiality extends to all possible worlds (in a loose sense).<sup>571</sup> That is to say, God knows the counterfactuals of each and every possible world by virtue of the divine vision, and that the similarity of such possible worlds is determined by these counterfactuals. Since counterfactuals' modal status, or truth, is determined by the correspondence between states of affairs in some world and the divine vision, it would follow that the true counterfactuals must cohere throughout possible worlds since they are all related to the single, unchanging divine vision. Moreover, these counterfactuals would also not be necessarily true because although the divine intellect is necessary, this does not entail that all propositions within that intellect are necessary. This, however, is a very brief sketch that requires considerable elaboration elsewhere. It will suffice to say, presently, that Plantinga's analysis, or an outright rejection of Lewisian metaphysics, disposes of Hasker's modal objection, and that there is no obviously good reason to reject the Plantingan view if possible worlds semantics are to be assumed. That said, although we have hitherto rejected possible worlds semantics, there remains ample possibility to develop a possible worlds semantics within a Thomistic framework that provides Molinists with foundations required for middle knowledge.

#### IV. Hasker's Logical Sequence Objection

Although Hasker endorses this objection wholeheartedly, he attributes it to Robert Merrihew Adams and Anthony Kenny<sup>572</sup> – though in fact it is a relevant consideration in foreknowledge debates stretching back over a millennium. The objection concerns the logical positioning of God's middle knowledge in relation to his creative act. Adams writes:

Middle knowledge [...] is supposed to be useful to God in making decisions, and God's choices in creating are supposed to be partly explained by the truth of some of the relevant counterfactuals. The truth of those counterfactuals must therefore be prior to God's choices, in order of explanation. But Plantinga's analysis makes God's choices prior, in the order of explanation, to the truth of counterfactuals. For it makes the truth

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<sup>571</sup> I appreciate here the point made by Nicholas Wolterstorff that Aquinas uses the divine vision to distinguish between the possible and the actual. I am inclined to say he has interpreted Aquinas quite rightly here. As such, I am cognizant that although this is a Thomist view, it is not Aquinas' views. See: Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Practice* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018), 240.

<sup>572</sup> Hasker, *God*, 36; cf. Anthony Kenny, *The God of Philosophers* (Oxford, 1979), 70-71.

of counterfactuals depend partly on which possible world is actual, which depends in part on God's choices.<sup>573</sup>

It is important to understand that Adams is not concerned with temporal sequence here, but explanatory or logical ordering. Recall from above the logical sequencing of God's types of knowledge. For the Molinist, God's middle knowledge is logically prior to his creative decree. The objection here takes issue with this notion. It suggests that Molinist is quite mistaken to say the truth of counterfactuals are prior to God's choice, by which I assume Adams means God's creative decree, since the truth of counterfactuals must rely on truths about the actual world, and such truths only hold after the creative decree. After all, how can there be truths about the actual world if there is no actual world? It is like one saying that his or her wife is very attractive despite not having a wife,

There is great potency to this argument, and since we are offering Plantinga's account – or at least some Thomistic re-formulation of it – as a plausible one, we are (intellectually) compelled to respond. Plantinga himself retorts by claiming that the truth of counterfactuals do not need to be settled in the actual world to be knowable, but that in fact all one needs is that the actual world be a constituent of some set of possible worlds in which the counterfactual is true.<sup>574</sup> To illustrate, take the counterfactual 'if a blonde-haired pensioner were to run against the Democratic nominee for president, the blonde-haired pensioner would win'. According to Plantinga, the truth of this particular counterfactual need not be determined in the actual world, it merely needs to be the case that a blonde-haired pensioner would beat the Democratic nominee to the presidency were said pensioner to run in some set of worlds of which the actual world is a constituent. This would entail that the true counterfactuals of freedom in all actualisable worlds are the same, but that suffices to dispense with the objection: for if it is the case that the same counterfactuals of freedom are true in all worlds which God might deem good to create, then the truth of those counterfactuals is, *contra* Kenny and Adams, independent of the actual. Consequently, the logical sequencing objection collapses.

Hasker buys this response. However, he utilises it as a platform for a secondary line of argumentation I do not wish to assess whether Hasker is right to accept such a response. Rather, I will opt to assess Hasker's follow up.

While Hasker accepts Plantinga's response, he argues it raises the question of how these counterfactuals could be true in all possible worlds without being necessary.<sup>575</sup> This is the Achilles' heel of Plantinga's view. One might be inclined to say that some conditional is contingently true in all possible worlds, but that would seem to be an uninteresting claim since it would not avoid the conclusion that it would necessarily be true that the counterfactual would obtain. To illustrate, suppose I have three cars and offer you one. They are all red. Now, the fact that they are all red is contingent. I could have had a green car or indeed a purple one but they are nonetheless red. Given you have to choose one of the cars, it is necessary that you have a red car, although their redness is contingent.

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<sup>573</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, 'Middle Knowledge', *Journal of Philosophy* 70:17 (1973), 553.

<sup>574</sup> Alvin Plantinga, 'Reply to Robert M. Adams,' in: James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen (eds.), *Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht, 1985), 371-382.

<sup>575</sup> Hasker, *God*, 38ff.

As stressed earlier, I am inclined to say the best response is to deny the possible worlds semantics altogether, although I have tried to develop a Thomistic account that can be relied upon if a possible worlds semantics is required. All Hasker's objections collapse under such a denial. However, I do not think the Plantingan account – and the Thomistic possible worlds account developed from it – is hopeless. The problem is that Plantinga falls into a trap in his response.

If we return to Adams' argument, Adams' talk of explanatory priority needs expounding. I am quite unclear on what Adams means.<sup>576</sup> Hasker has suggested that Adams should be taken to mean " $p$  is explanatorily prior to  $q$  iff  $p$  must be included in a complete explanation of why  $q$  obtains."<sup>577</sup> In other words, since we cannot explain how God knows  $P \rightarrow Q$  without referring to  $p$ ,  $p$  must be explanatorily prior to  $q$ . This seems plausible and would demonstrate that the truth of counterfactuals is not wholly independent of truth in the actual world, but I am not sure why this is problematic. As I understand the problem, it is framed in terms such that God cannot know truths about the actual world if the actual world does not yet exist – the reasoning seems to be just that if we do not have the world, we cannot explain true counterfactuals. I am yet to see a decent argument for this. On the contrary, the Thomistic account explains just why this framing is wrong. Since God's divine presentiaity encompasses all being, His knowledge of the actual world need not be contingent on the actual world existing – at least, not in the temporal mode – for the world exists in the divine intellect prior to its actual instantiation. Hasker might object to this, but there seems to be no obvious incoherence in holding that God's divine vision is simultaneous with His middle knowledge. Consequently, the problem raised by Hasker also collapses. Moreover, should we reject this Thomistic account, it is still unclear that the Plantingan needs to accept the weight of the objection since it seems to assume that similarity causes or grounds the truth of counterfactuals, but that isn't the claim: the claim is that similarity shows what it is for a counterfactual to be true.

## V. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have attempted to refute three of Hasker's objections to Molinism. I have done some by defending the LCEM, by denying the possible worlds semantics upon which his objections are predicated, and by arguing that even in a possible worlds semantics of counterfactuals must be held, a Plantingan-cum-Thomistic formulation thereof is capable of dispatching Hasker's concerns. Much of this is speculative but important groundwork. Recall that Hasker's project was to undermine the truth and coherence of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Given his objections fail, he has failed to do that. More importantly that resisting Hasker's attacks on middle knowledge, perhaps, is that this paper has opened up options to the Molinist and explored fertile ground for synthesis between the Molinist and Thomistic positions that transcend the yet-unresolved dispute of the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*.

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<sup>576</sup> Craig notes that Adams' position seems to equivocate. This is a reasonable charge, in my view, and it explains the difficulty in making sense of Adams' position. See: William Lane Craig, 'Robert Adams' New Anti-Molinist Argument', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 (1994), 857-86.

<sup>577</sup> William Hasker, 'Explanatory Priority: Transitive and Unequivocal: A Reply to William Craig', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57:2 (1997), 390.



## Chapter 10: Thomism-Molinism – a Counterfactual Synthesis

In the last chapter, I refuted William Hasker's objections to middle knowledge by defending LCEM. I did this by denying the possible worlds semantics upon which his objections are predicated, and by arguing that even in a possible worlds semantics of counterfactuals must be held, a Plantingan-cum-Thomistic formulation. In this chapter, I want to outline an original Thomist-Molinist account of counterfactuals based on what I call 'meta-vision' before explaining why the Plantingan account would likewise work, but is to be less preference.

### Synthesis

I argue that the Molinist model and the Thomistic model are reconcilable if we postulate that God's divine presentiality or presentness extends to all possible worlds (in a loose sense).<sup>578</sup> That is to say, God knows the counterfactuals of each and every possible world by virtue of a type of knowledge similar to the divine but distinct from it, and the objective similarity relations within God's mind determines, the truth value of those counterfactuals. Let's call the type of knowledge 'meta-vision'. Since counterfactuals' modal status, or truth, is determined by the correspondence between states of affairs in some world and the meta-vision, it would follow that the true counterfactuals must cohere throughout possible worlds since they are all related to the single, unchanging divine vision. Moreover, these counterfactuals would also not be necessarily true because although the divine intellect is necessary in that it is possessed by a God that enjoys necessary existence, this does not entail that all propositions within that intellect are necessary.

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<sup>578</sup> As mentioned earlier: I appreciate here the point made by Nicholas Wolterstorff that Aquinas uses the divine vision to distinguish between the possible and the actual. I am inclined to say he has interpreted Aquinas quite rightly here. As such, I am cognizant that although this is a Thomist view, it is not Aquinas' views. See: Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Practice* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018), 240.

Let us illustrate with some mundane example: Tom's cheese sandwich. On this view, God sees every event in history all as a single moment, as an eternal present. This is the timeless, eternal mode of being. On this view, God timelessly sees Tom preparing the sandwich at  $T_1$  and then he timelessly sees Tom eating the sandwich at  $T_2$ . On the classical Thomistic view, God's knowledge is seen as timeless and conjunctive, call it A:

A: Tom prepared a sandwich at  $T_1$  and God timelessly knows Tom ate that sandwich at  $T_2$ .

On this, it is true then that Tom's preparing a sandwich at  $T_1$  entails – not logically, but materially – that Tom's eating the sandwich at  $T_2$ . In other words, we can affirm the conditional A\*:

A\*: 'If Tom prepares a sandwich at  $T_1$ , he will consume it at  $T_2$ ' is true.

Aquinas does not affirm God knows A\* but it can be inferred from his view because we know God knows both constituent parts of the complex proposition as true. Tom's making and eating of the sandwich is present to God and therefore, in the divine vision, constitutes fact about the world (in the eternal mode), even if such states have not materialised in the temporal mode. As it stands, we are viewing this as a conditional, but we can re-state it as a subjunctive conditional- A\*\*:<sup>579</sup>

A\*\*: If it were the case that Tom were to prepare a sandwich at  $T_1$ , he would consume it at  $T_2$ .

In A\*, God knows it is true because both the antecedent and the consequent, and indeed the relation between them, are true facts about the world but they are facts not accessible within the constraints of the temporal mode. Recall: On Aquinas' view, God

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<sup>579</sup> Counterfactuals can either be subjunctive conditionals or pluperfect conditionals. Most scholars treat them as equivalent insofar as the problem of divine foreknowledge is concerned and I will likewise follow suit.



knows them in the eternal mode prevolitionally; yet Molina disputes that. When we think of  $A^*$ , we see it is not very different from  $A^{**}$  structurally in that counterfactuals are conditionals about alternative possibilities too. What I want to stress is this similarity since a denial of counterfactual's truth will also undermine claims of the truth of material conditionals, thereby strengthening the case for the truth of counterfactuals. Just as God knows  $A^*$  from a Thomist perspective due to His divine vision, He can also know  $A^{**}$  as true by virtue of His middle knowledge from a Molinist perspective. In both cases, God's knowledge of the future stems from His intellect. This seems to be a perfectly coherent and defensible approach to grounding counterfactuals, and indeed a more concrete one. An illustration might be helpful here, so as not to conflate contingents (as the focus of the Thomistic view) and conditionals. In the fiction book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it is true that 'if Tom Robinson were to be convicted, he would be shot'. We know this to be true because we know that Robinson is convicted and, subsequently, is shot. The antecedent and consequent hold. For Robinson, he could not know that such a conditional is true, but for Harper Lee, as the author, that conditional is known to be true precisely because she, in her different and transcending mode as author, knows both the antecedent and consequent. The different modes preclude circularity. Similarly, then, we may say God knows counterfactuals in His eternal mode because He knows contingent facts in the actual world, such as the fact that Rishi Sunak is the Prime Minister.<sup>580</sup> To explain this example further, 10 years ago, Rishi Sunak did not know 'if Rishi Sunak were to become an MP, he would become Prime Minister in 2022' yet God did precisely because God has that authorial transcendence that allows Him to know both that Sunak would become an MP and that he would become Prime Minister. The contingent facts derived from God's knowledge of vision inform God's middle

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<sup>580</sup> I am indebted to David Oderberg for suggesting an illustration of this kind.

knowledge, hence providing meta-vision.

Now, to integrate the Molinist perspective, we can describe the situation as follows: from eternity, God surveys all possible worlds through meta-vision. He knows what will happen in each of these possible worlds as counterfactual truths but also as straightforward propositions in that He knows, factually, which world He will actualise and the facts that are deducible from that. The tricky enigma to unravel here is how the divine vision and middle knowledge align into meta-vision since Thomas' divine vision entails truth claims about future contingents that Molina rejects. I posit that it might look something like this: natural knowledge, as in Aquinas and Molina, is primal. It is conceptually and logically prior. The divine vision, extrapolated into meta-vision to cover all possible worlds, is then concurrent with middle knowledge in that God sees all time and all possible truth values in any given state of affairs across possible worlds. God sees the future in possible world  $W_1$  and from that understands which counterfactuals about the world would be true, if actualized. In other words: the meta-vision is what grounds the middle knowledge. Recall above, it was asserted that counterfactuals' modal status, or truth, is determined by the correspondence between states of affairs in some world and the divine vision. God's divine vision allows Him to establish that correspondence. An objection here might be that it sounds like we are saying possible worlds that God opts not to actualize can have true contingent propositions about them. This is counter-intuitive. In response, one can reply that that is not quite the case. Rather, God is like an author plotting out potential story lines. Each storyline has certain contingent truths but these remain counterfactual without actualization. When God sees true singular future contingents in possible worlds, He is simply seeing sort of hypothetical truths which allow Him to form counterfactuals. When He chooses to create, He is like an author putting pen to paper. He is actualizing and creating a reality from what is within His intellect. By this process, He acquires 'free knowledge'.

The more difficult question is when the counterfactuals are true. On this view, counterfactuals are true eternally in one sense but not another. In the eternal mode, they are true counterfactuals in the sense that God knows, eternally, the state of affairs that will obtain. Like an author knows the plot of her book ‘from the outside’, God knows propositions – and counterfactuals – from outside of time. However, in the temporal mode, the counterfactual becomes true only when the temporal mode is created or when the state of affairs the counterfactual describes obtains within the temporal time-series. To that extent, this view is a hybrid of Aquinas and Molina’s views about the correspondence of truth values across the time/eternity divide. A consideration of an objection might shed light on this. One obvious objection to this view is that it seems ludicrous that a proposition can be eternally true but temporally indeterminate in truth value simultaneously. First, it should be retorted that the objection is lessened when we distinguish between *metaphysics* and *epistemology*. The counter-intuitiveness stems from the concern that this amounts to a claim that a proposition can be both true and not true at the same time, which would constitute a contradiction. However, that fails to account that the metaphysical framework that divides time and eternity precludes this. The synthesis does, one should admit, entail the claim that a proposition about the future is both knowable and not knowable simultaneously. Yet this is much less worrisome since it is uncontroversial to say that knowability is often a matter of perspective. To illustrate, suppose a baby sees his father walk away from the crib while she is crying. The baby does not merely know that the father is going to get milk; it is unknowable in the mode of a baby. From the father’s mode of being, it is both known and knowable. Likewise, in the temporal mode, we cannot know future contingents or even counterfactuals as we lack the appropriate mode to do so. However, that does not preclude such counterfactuals being knowable from a different mode.

Second, I do not see why this need be construed as ludicrous. A standard criticism of the

Molinist view is that God gains free knowledge. However, the view I am proposing does not require that God gains knowledge because His free knowledge is actually rooted in eternity (again, as per both Aquinas and Molina). What becomes true – and therefore knowable – in the temporal mode is contingent upon which world is actualised but the becoming true of some proposition in the temporal mode need not be considered an addition to God’s knowledge since God already knows the truth of whatever proposition is true from eternity. That, in the plot, it becomes true that if Tom Robinson were convicted, he would be shot, is hardly news to Harper Lee, who possessed such knowledge from outside the mode of the plot. Now, whether the counterfactual ‘if Tom Robinson were convicted, he would be shot’ becomes true at the outset of the book or at that specific moment of the narrative that Robinson is convicted has no bearing Lee’s knowledge. To return this back to God, and recognizing the looseness of the analogy to fiction, we can say that the precise moment at which some proposition becomes true in the temporal mode is inconsequential in regards to God’s eternal meta-knowledge knowledge. This is because He knows prior to His creative decree what the results of that decree will be. After all, He chose that particular decree based on the outcome it would produce. It is, I would further suggest, inconsequential in regards to human freedom. For creaturely freedom to be maintained, all that is required is that the truth of some proposition not be determined in the temporal mode prior to the creation of some possible world. On our view, this condition is met because the truth of propositions, in the temporal mode, is realised at or after the creation moment. While it is true that, eternally, the proposition is determined, this truth – as per Aquinas’ divine vision and meta-knowledge – is not determinative. What is meant by this? Truth in the eternal mode is determined from eternity; it is fixed in the mind of God, but this truth is not necessarily determinative in the temporal mode in the sense God’s prior knowledge of what will happen is causally inefficacious in regard to creaturely freedom.

To put this together: prior to creation, God immediately apprehends all possible worlds, much as Aquinas describes in the divine vision, but extrapolated into meta-vision. He, in the eternal mode, knows true propositions about these worlds. These are true in an abstract sense, as alluded to earlier. This is not to be construed as a strong modal realist claim that all possible worlds exist in the same way as the actual world.<sup>581</sup> For example, in some possible world  $W_1$ , it is true that Elon founds a car company. That is just to say, that were that world actualised, Elon would found a car company. To give another example, if it is (hypothetically) true that in  $W_1$  that Charles is the Prince of Wales and that William is Charles' eldest son, God can utilize those contingent facts to form counterfactuals like 'if Charles becomes king, William will become Prince of Wales'. Further, He can form<sup>582</sup> counterfactuals more broadly in terms of the world: If  $W_1$  were to be actualised, then Charles will become king. He can deduce from that that if  $W_1$  were to be actualised, William will become Prince of Wales. As such, God has counterfactual knowledge in the eternal realm. Once God decides which world to create, then these counterfactuals become true not just eternally but temporally. This is where God obtains free knowledge on the traditional Molinist view, but the key point on our view is that such free knowledge has, indirectly, been held by God eternally. All that is new is the temporal unfolding of events that alters the truth values in the temporal mode, which – as we noted in chapter 8 – remains open. In that regard, God is not really learning anything new. He's just seeing what He already knows come to fruition in a different, much like an author reading their own book.

### Objections

There are a few objections that can be anticipated in response to this view. To briefly

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<sup>581</sup> See, for example: Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford, 1986).

<sup>582</sup> I use words like 'form' and 'deduce' throughout for ease. In truth, this implies a successive process, which would not be the case with God. Rather, these are simultaneous and instantaneous mental events for Him and I am simply using common parlance to capture the logical ordering of the divine intellect.

explore them:

Gratuitous – Given I have argued for the independent sufficiency of both the Molinist and Thomist views to resolve the problem of theological fatalism, the development of this view might be thought a little needless. Is it not positing a needlessly complicated solution to a problem that has already been solved? I argue not, for four reasons. First, as explained, is that while both solutions solve the theological fatalist dilemma, neither provide as strong an account of omniscience as we would like. On this view, God's knowledge is maximized in the sense that it does justice to God's omniscience in the way that the views independently fail to do. Unlike on Aquinas' account where God's knowledge of counterfactuals is just ignored,<sup>583</sup> God is imbued with clearly defined counterfactual knowledge. If He did not enjoy such knowledge, it would ostensibly be the case that humans have propositional knowledge that God does not. Unlike on Molina's account, we avoid the accusation that God acquires knowledge, an allegation that is underpinned by the implicit assumption that God's knowledge is incomplete prior to the creative act. A God with all knowledge can scarcely have incomplete knowledge at any point. Second, as will be seen in the next chapter, this synthesis provides a clearer and more satisfying framework for divine action, such as responses to petitionary prayer. A classic criticism of the Thomist position is that God is too detached to act. What I mean by this, as referred to in the chapter defending timeless action, is that the Thomist view is easily caricatured as God being an observer rather than a participant.<sup>584</sup> However, this synthesis, through filling the gap (i.e. this ostensible detachment) via reference to middle knowledge, helps explain how a God that experiences all things as present can

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<sup>583</sup> Aquinas never, as far as I am aware, denies God's middle knowledge explicitly. It appears he simply does not think it relevant enough to centre his discussion of omniscience around. It is not something that is on his intellectual radar.

<sup>584</sup> Brian Davies identifies this as a caricature that Aquinas should not be associated with, see: Brian Davies, 'Introduction', in: Brian Davies (ed.), *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays* (Lanham, 2006), xiii.

interact with His creatures that reside within the temporal series. Since God takes His creatures' desires into account explicitly through His middle knowledge, God is more visibly and intimately involved in His creation. Third, while not strictly relevant to its applicability as a resolution of the problem of theological fatalism, the synthesis has an ecumenical, or at the very least eirenic, function. As alluded to earlier, Molinists and Thomists have spent centuries separated by a theological chasm that Molina himself never intended nor desired to open. As a result, much productive and collaborative dialogue between Molinists and Thomists has gone unspoken. The great Orthodox theologian Georgi Vasilievich Florovsky observed that "for the ecumenical dialogue to bear fruit, the very controversies that separate the churches must not be hushed up. Rather they must be brought into the open and discussed frankly, respectfully, and thoroughly."<sup>585</sup> If we can pull together disparate theological outlooks on the question of divine knowledge, a question that has divided the Church for centuries, then that paves the way to a better understanding of God more generally through a mutual appreciation and study of different perspectives. Given that, at its heart, this project is about understanding God, such an end seems to be a desirable by-product of this synthesis. Fourth, and finally, it provides an alternative to the classical Stalnaker-Lewis model of counterfactuals that critics like Hasker use as a basis for their attacks on Middle Knowledge. While, as shown in an earlier section, the Stalnaker-Lewis model can be maintained while dispensing with Hasker's critique, this alternative model provides an additional way of defending the middle knowledge position.

### A Troublesome Link Between Conjuncts and Counterfactuals

The synthesis I have outlined allows that God can infer counterfactuals from conjuncts.

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<sup>585</sup> Georges Florovsky, 'The Ascetic Ideal and the New Testament', in: Raymond Miller (trans.) *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky: The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers* (n.a, 1987), 21.

This concern fundamentally centres on a denial of conjunction conditionalization, the idea that  $(X \wedge Y) \supset (X \supset Y)$  is invalid. Lee Walters and J. Robert G. Williams have fairly recently convincingly argued that to deny this conditionalization requires that enormous metaphysical sacrifices. They write: “At the very least, removing Conjunction Conditionalization is no minor surgery, but a complicated operation involving the mutilation of far more entrenched aspects of the logic of conditionals.”<sup>586</sup> Without replicating the paper here, they demonstrate that such a denial would require a rejection of some of the most intuitive aspects of logic, such as the principles of agglomeration. Arif Ahmed has noted that Walters’ and Williams’ argument is not, in principle, impossible to overcome if we reject standard counterfactual logics.<sup>587</sup> However, I think that highlights the importance of the conditionalization. While, as seen above, I do not defend the Stalnaker-Lewis accounts unconditionally, Ahmed’s ostensible realisation that we have to reject standard theories of counterfactuals to get around the conditionalization indicates that the conditionalization itself is plausible. As such, I think the link between conjunction and counterfactuals provided in our synthesis is defensible and plausible. A further objection here is that it seems that God would know an infinite number of counterfactuals. For example, if God can form counterfactuals from conjuncts, there seems to be no limit to what counterfactuals He can form and if they are true. For example, if it is true that Boris is Prime Minister and Elizabeth II is Queen, what is to stop God forming the counterfactual ‘If Boris is Prime Minister, then Elizabeth II is Queen’? While this might be true in a strictly logical sense, the objection would run, it is a very unnatural claim to make. After all, Elizabeth II’s reign is not contingent on Boris’ premiership. There are two responses one can give to this. First, given that the

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<sup>586</sup> Lee Walters and J. Robert G. Williams, ‘An Argument for Conjunction Conditionalization’, *Review of Symbolic Logic* 6:4 (2013), 573-88.

<sup>587</sup> Arif Ahmed, ‘Walters on Conjunction Conditionalization’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 111 (2011), 115-22.



conditionalization holds, that should surely take precedence over the intuition that it is an unnatural claim to make, especially when rejection of the conditionalization yields even more unnatural claims. Second, there is, in principle, space for God to constrain His counterfactuals via His knowledge of the causal chain. That is to say, God might take into consideration the causal sequence in deducing true counterfactual claims. This could be something akin to Goldman's causal criterion for knowledge. For Goldman, to possess knowledge requires identifying some causal relation.<sup>588</sup> Likewise, God can restrict His middle knowledge by infallibly following the causal chain to identify it is appropriate (i.e. the antecedent bears some relevant causal relation to the consequent).

Grounding – A further concern one can anticipate is one of grounding. What makes a counterfactual true? On our account, recall that God is the author of creation, the narrative of created existence is grounded in His mind. This would seem to imply that the truth of some proposition depends on its correspondence to God's mind. This might give rise to the claim that our argument is circular in that God knows some proposition is true because He knows it to be true. It is, perhaps, testing the truth of God's beliefs against His beliefs. If this is friendly fire from theist quarters, it is difficult to see what the issue is. The classical concept of God holds that God is the foundation of all truth. There is nothing outside of God against which to measure the truth of propositions. To object to that role for God is to reject classical theism. Perhaps a weightier objection is that our position denies a correspondence theory of truth rooted in the actual world, but that is mistaken. After all, all claims in the temporal mode are true according to the correspondence to the actual world. God's eternal beliefs are different, of course, but if the objection is that eternal beliefs must correspond to a temporal world, then the objection beggars belief.

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<sup>588</sup> Alvin I. Goldman, 'A Causal Theory of Knowing', *Journal of Philosophy* 64:12 (1967), 357-72.

Ad hoc-ness – this objection would likely focus on the claim that this account of counterfactuals seems devised entirely to resolve the theological fatalist dilemma and synthesise the Thomist and Molinist view. In other words, no-one would conceptualise of counterfactuals and their grounding in terms of God except to rescue Him from the fatalist dilemma. There are two points to say in response to this sort of objection. First, ad hocness is only a relevant criterion for evaluating theories if the theories are equivalent in their plausibility. That is to say, in the event that we are confronted with two opposing theories of equal merit except that one is more ad hoc, we should prefer the less ad hoc one. However, as argued above, I think this synthesis is superior to competing theories. The second point is that the view should not be seen as ad hoc. As noted above, this synthesis fits well with the claim that God is the foundation and source of all truth. If we take that as our working assumption, as this thesis does insofar as it presupposes classical theism, then this view is very natural. Having outlined the synthesis, we can turn back to the Plantingian view discussed in the previous chapter in the context of Hasker's criticisms. Recall that in criticising and amending the Lewisian view, Plantinga defended the view that counterfactuals are not necessarily true. What this notion of similarity would entail is that if we take two possible worlds, call them W1 and W2, whichever one of the two shares the most counterfactuals with the actual world (call it Wa) is the most similar to the actual world. Given that Lewis instructs us to ground counterfactuals in the similarity between the nearest possible worlds, we are surely well within our rights to conclude that far from counterfactuals being true in all possible worlds, they must vary across possible worlds, and can therefore not be necessarily true. To illustrate this, consider the following example. Take the counterfactuals:

S: if Mr Claus had stopped for a mince pie, Mrs Claus would have shouted at him.

S\*: if Mr Claus had stopped for a mince pie, Mrs Claus would not have shouted at him.

Let us assume we have two worlds, W1 and W2. These worlds share an initial-segment – perhaps in that initial segment, Mrs Claus had warned Mr Claus that he must not have any mince pies since it would make him leaner and she is rather well inclined towards the muscular gentleman. The content of that segment is rather irrelevant so long as the content is identical in both worlds. This would entail that, on the Lewisian account, that W1 and W2 are equally similar, or near, to Wa, the actual world. Now, suppose in W1, Mrs Claus shouts at Mr Claus, but in W2 Mrs Claus does not shout at him (perhaps he had brushed away the crumbs to conceal his wrongdoing). What this reveals is that the Lewisian account fails to explain whether S or S\* is true since it is not the case that the consequents of S or S\* are true in the nearest worlds to the actual world in which the antecedents of S and S\* also hold true. Why? The antecedent of S and S\* may be true in both W1 and W2, but the consequent of both S and S\* cannot both be true in any possible world. Since both worlds are equidistant in similarity terms to Wa, it means that neither S nor S\* can be true in W1 or W2, though of course it could be that S\* is true in W1, but this requires that we adopt a counterfactual analysis of similarity whereby similarity is established by the common possession of certain true counterfactuals rather than the initial segment analysis taken by Hasker.<sup>589</sup> As Plantinga remarks: “from the fact that W and W\* share the appropriate initial segment, it does not follow that they are equally similar to  $\alpha$  [the actual world].”<sup>590</sup> Indeed, if the Molinist were inclined to accept the Lewisian account of counterfactuals, they could do so on this counterfactual analysis of similarity. In any case, what this argument demonstrates is that counterfactuals are not true in all possible worlds and therefore are not necessarily true. Hasker’s inference of necessity is derived from the non-applicability of comparative similarity on initial-segment cases, but Plantinga’s account simply by-passes the problem. The moral of the

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<sup>589</sup> Hasker, *God, passim*.

<sup>590</sup> Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 179; cf. Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (Ithaca, 1989), 146ff.

story for the Molinist and our synthesis is that Plantinga offers an account that escapes the inference of necessity that Hasker tried to commit us to.

In the previous chapter, I argued that this account is defensible, but I think it is not as desirable as the account that I have laid out because the similarity criterion, even in terms of true counterfactuals, is elusive and lacks concreteness. Grounding counterfactuals in possible worlds and vague notions of similarity lacks the clarity of correspondence that my view provides. More crucially, this sort of re-writing of Lewis' view does not really do God justice. If the truth of counterfactuals is contingent on a similarity analysis, that suggests the truth is independent of God in some sense. By contrast, my view offers a stronger role for God's omniscience in that He determines the truth of counterfactuals. However, Plantinga's analysis provides an important lesson on the necessity of counterfactuals. His view enables him demonstrate that counterfactuals are not true in all possible worlds and therefore are not necessarily true. If, as my synthesis suggests, counterfactuals are true from eternity, then are they not necessarily true? This is, perhaps, the most significant objection to the synthesis. In response, the necessity of counterfactuals must vary. In the eternal mode, counterfactuals are necessarily true in the sense that they are rooted in the intellect of a necessary God. It is necessarily true that if W1 were actualised, then some specific state of affairs would obtain. This is a sort of metaphysical necessity. However, the specific state of affairs that would obtain is contingent on what creatures would freely do in that particular world. As such, the necessity does not bind that world. Rather, the necessity of what would happen is logically posterior what the creatures would freely do. Once a world is created, there is a metaphysical and necessity that applies to that world. For example, if God looked at possible worlds with His middle knowledge and chose to actualise one in which His son would be crucified, the crucifixion of the Son of God is metaphysically and nomologically determined. It cannot not come to pass. However, this is not necessary in

the sense of being deterministic because, again, the middle knowledge is prior to the creative act. The decree to create follows the free choice, not vice-versa. So while eternal counterfactuals are necessary, the necessity of counterfactuals in the temporal mode varies. What is counterfactually true in one world will not be true in another. As such, Plantinga's theory is defensible but it is not to be preferred to the synthesis that I have offered. That notwithstanding, Plantinga's analysis highlights that counterfactuals can vary between worlds and preserve creaturely freedom. As applied to my view, that ensures that God's knowledge is not deterministic.

### Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have sketched out my own synthesis of the Molinist and Thomist position, which utilizes Molina's emphasis on the divine vision and Molina's emphasis on middle knowledge to postulate 'metavision'. I have also demonstrated why I think it is preferable to a comparative possible worlds semantics, expanding on our discussion from the previous chapter. The picture painted expands God's omniscience and providential role while preserving human freedom. To illustrate the strengths of this view further, the next chapter will illustrate how this view would work on application to issues such as petitionary prayer and miracles. It will be shown that the synthesis is more plausible than the Thomist and Molinist views individually.

## Chapter 11: Theological Applications of the Synthesis

In this chapter, I explore how the synthesis developed thus far can offer some insight into how God is said to work in the world. Following Thomas P. Flint's exposition of the Molinist application to the doctrines of papal infallibility, prayer, and prophesy, I will likewise treat these topics. However, this chapter will also delve deeper into the character of Christ and the doctrine of the hypostatic union, as well as the hiddenness of God.

### Papal Infallibility

Before delving into defining papal infallibility, it is worth noting that the defender of Molinism, Thomism, or indeed the synthesis that it defended in this thesis need to subscribe to the doctrine. Indeed, I am inclined to agree with Martin Luther's magnificent and dramatic rejection of papal infallibility at the Leipzig disputation on the basis that ostensibly infallible declarations were later overridden.<sup>591</sup> However, in the spirit of ecumenicalism and in recognition that Catholic and non-Catholic Christians are more alike than different despite this "complex and emotional" divide (to use Thomas Rausch's diplomatic phrase),<sup>592</sup> it is fruitful to show how Catholics can apply this to their particular denominational tenet.

The first point that one ought to make about papal infallibility is that it is grossly misunderstood. It is grounded in Matthew 16:18-19 in which Christ arguably bestows upon the

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<sup>591</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York, 1950), 78-79. It also seems to me that there is simply not adequate argument for papal infallibility. The infallibility was conferred on the Apostles, if such infallibility were conferred, derived from a gift of the Holy Spirit. Given such gifts have long ceased, the Pope cannot claim any such apostolic infallibility. On cessation, see: Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York, 1918), 1-32; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, 1979), 89-116; and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: The Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (East Peoria, 1993; reprint), especially chapter 3.

<sup>592</sup> Thomas P. Rausch, 'Lutherans and Catholics on Infallibility', *America* 141 (1979), 335.

Apostle Peter a unique and authoritative responsibility for building the church, and in which the church is arguably entrusted with the charism of infallibility. As the teaching magisterium, of which the Pope is the head, most clearly manifests the charism, the Pope is deemed to be in some sense infallible.<sup>593</sup> However, this infallibility is not a broad stroke infallibility in all matters. The doctrine was first defined dogmatically in *Pastor Aeternus* in 1869-70 in the First Ecumenical Council of the Vatican:

We teach and define that it is a dogma Divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff when he speaks ex cathedra, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves and not from the consent of the Church irreformable.<sup>594</sup>

The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, in *Lumen Gentium*, re-affirmed the doctrine in similar terms:

This Sacred Council, following closely in the footsteps of the First Vatican Council, with that Council teaches and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, established His holy Church, having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father; and He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world. And in order that the episcopate

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<sup>593</sup> N/A, 'Infallibility', in: Michael L. Coulter, Richard S. Myers, and Joseph A. Varacalli (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science, and Social Policy*, Volume 3 (Lanham, 2012), 150-51; Jack Mulder Jr., *What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?* (Grand Rapids, 2015), 51; Kevin T. Keating, *Papal Teaching in the Age of Infallibility: 1870 to Present* (Eugene, 2018), 30ff.

<sup>594</sup> Quoted from: Edward Pace, 'Ex Cathedra', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 5. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05677a.htm> (accessed: 18/07/2022).

itself might be one and undivided, He placed Blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion. And all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the meaning and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and of his infallible magisterium, this Sacred Council again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful.<sup>595</sup>

While the doctrine was only stated dogmatically in the nineteenth-century, it has a clear pedigree stretching back to the medieval period.<sup>596</sup> Matthew J. Tuininga has convincingly demonstrated that Innocent III and Innocent IV were both instrumental in the solidification of the doctrine.<sup>597</sup> This historical account of its development is pertinent precisely because the doctrine developed from a perceived theological need for infallibility on earth, and the synthesis I present provides some of the theoretical groundwork for that.

First, I take it that Flint's argument that middle knowledge provides the basis for papal infallibility is plausible.<sup>598</sup> Flint presents his argument in response to the following hypothetical objection:

(1) If the Pope is a free creature, then he must always speak freely when he speaks.<sup>599</sup>

(2) The Pope is a free creature.

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<sup>595</sup> This translation is provided by the Vatican at 'Lumen Gentium', [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), (accessed: 18/07/2022), see chapter 3, §18. On this question of re-affirmation, Mark E. Powell, a Protestant theologian, has noted there is some tension between the two statements in that the latter dogma's intended clarification of the *ex sese* clause ostensibly generates a discrepancy in the purported function of the faithful's assent to the church's teaching authority. See: Mark E. Powell, *Papal Infallibility: A Protestant Evaluation of an Ecumenical issue* (Grand Rapids, 2009), 42. While Powell's analysis is worthwhile as a point of theological discussion, I do not think that the tension affects the question at hand.

<sup>596</sup> Brian Tierney traces it back to c.1150. On this, see: Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility, 1150-1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty, and Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1988).

<sup>597</sup> Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2017), 26.

<sup>598</sup> Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, 1998), 179-96; cf. Thomas P. Flint, 'Middle Knowledge and the Doctrine of Infallibility', *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), 373-93.

<sup>599</sup> I say 'he' here as Catholic teaching necessitates that the Bishop of Rome is a man. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* reads thusly: "Priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching,



(3) Therefore, when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra*, he speaks freely.<sup>600</sup>

(4) If God speaks freely when speaking *ex cathedra*, then he can resist the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

(5) If the Pope can resist the assistance of the Holy Spirit, he must be to err and therefore speak fallibly.

(6) Therefore, it is false to say that the Pope speaks infallibly when he speaks *ex cathedra*.<sup>601</sup>

*Prima facie*, this argument is problematic for Catholics since it is not obvious which premise they can reject. (1) seems definitionally true, at least if we construe ‘free’ in a strict sense. As Flint himself notes, denying (1) and (2) is not very satisfactory because it entails that the Pope cannot be free when speaking *ex cathedra*.<sup>602</sup> Flint is absolutely correct in this assessment but he does not fully realize the implications of this view. If the Pope cannot be free when speaking *ex cathedra*, then that has a number of serious implications for the Pope’s salvation since it undermines the notion that the Pope has freely committed himself to a saving faith, for he would no longer – one presumes – be freely able to confess Jesus as his lord and saviour.

Flint’s middle knowledge solution to this problem is thus:

It is here that the concept of middle knowledge seems to come to the rescue.<sup>10</sup> For if

God has middle knowledge, why can't he arrange things in such a way that the pope

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sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone.” See: John Paul II, ‘*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*’, 1994, < [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html) >, (accessed: 08/09/2022).

<sup>600</sup> The question of what exactly constitutes an *ex cathedra* proclamation is allegedly subject to debate among Catholic theologians. On this, see: Mark E. Powell, *Papal Infallibility: A Protestant Evaluation of an Ecumenical Issue* (Grand Rapids, 2009), 42ff. I have consulted several scholars on whether Powell’s assertion is correct and the consensus was that this is more or less correct as questions like whether the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* are *ex cathedra* remain disputed, as Powell points out.

<sup>601</sup> Flint, ‘Middle Knowledge’, 377-79.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

always freely follows his guidance? How, one might ask, can he do so? By seeing to it that the right person becomes pope. If God has middle knowledge, then he knows how any candidate for the office would act-would freely act-if elected pope. Using this knowledge, God would then direct the cardinals to select as pope one of those men who God knows would freely cooperate with his guidance and thereby safeguard the church from error; he would also lead them away from selecting any of those men who he knows would not freely cooperate with his guidance and consequently lead the Church into error. By then guiding the man selected in the ways that, as his middle knowledge tells him, will elicit a free but positive response from him, God can insure that the pope is infallible even though he respects his freedom. This respect for human freedom would presumably extend to the cardinals as well. God's direction of them toward certain candidates and away from others would most likely be accomplished, not by God's determining their actions, but by his arrangement of circumstances which he knows via middle knowledge will lead to the result he desires.<sup>603</sup>

It is important to note here that Flint, rightly, notes that on this sort of view that it is not necessarily the case that the Pope is both *free* and *infallible* in every possible world – but this, so far as Flint and I can see – is inconsequential because what is relevant for the veracity of the doctrine is this that it is true in this world.

In response to this sort of argument, Jerry L. Walls has raised an interesting argument. He argues that Flint's argument does not make sense of what I will call 'Popes in Practice'. Walls notes that if God uses middle knowledge to choose His popes, then we would expect consistently good popes. This is something that Flint, while not explicitly conceding, gets extraordinarily close to admitting. However, Walls notes, this expectation is evidently not

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid., 179.

consistently realized and – in his words – “is shattered by the brutal truth that many popes fell far short of the New Testament qualifications for bishops [...] there have been quite a few popes who not only fell short of the New Testament profile, but were notorious scoundrels.”<sup>604</sup>

As a non-believer in papal infallibility, I find Walls’ position persuasive. It is hard, for example, to study the papacy of John XII – characterised by the rankest immorality and debauchery – and believe that John XII was chosen by God in a special way. As one evangelical pastor quipped: ‘Flint’s view seems to require us to believe that God’s interview process for the most senior clergyman in the world is more lax than your average Baptist church’s interview process for an associate minister.’<sup>605</sup>

Walls’ takeaway from this is that while Flint is persuasive enough in showing middle knowledge is true and that the pope is infallible, the appeal to middle knowledge really generates this problem of ‘bad popes’. True enough, Flint can say that bad popes are not speaking *ex cathedra* in this or that case, but the core idea that God orders events to freely produce some optimific outcome becomes difficult to swallow when the ostensible optimific outcome is, in some cases, papal naughtiness.<sup>606</sup> In fairness to Walls, he concedes the Molinist has a number of responses, but he finds them unconvincing – even if middle knowledge and bad popes are, strictly speaking, consistent.

In response to Walls, our synthesis – particularly its illustration of authorial providence – is helpful. In his objection, he writes that the papist could respond:

Similarly, the ‘skeptical papist’ may say that there may be providential purposes for choosing the bad popes that we cannot begin to imagine or understand. While there

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<sup>604</sup> Jerry L. Walls, ‘The Argument from Bad Popes: The Argument from Conspicuous Corruption’, *Perichoresis* 18:5 (2020), 87–88.

<sup>605</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>606</sup> This idea that God would produce the best of all possible worlds is certainly subscribed to by Leibniz and is ostensibly assumed by Walls but it is unclear as to why the Catholic – or indeed, any theist philosopher – ought to accept this claim. There are substantive criticisms of it and it certainly is not entailed by the doctrine of papal infallibility.

may have been any number of papal candidates who were spiritually and morally much more suited to the papacy than Roderigo Borgia was, God may have had reasons entirely beyond our comprehension for arranging things so that he was elected Pope Alexander VI.<sup>607</sup>

It is unclear as to why this argument should be viewed as unpersuasive. As Walls concedes when it comes to the problem of evil, there are plenty of counter-intuitive happenings that God allows to serve some greater purpose. What Walls does not recognise is that if we accept his grounds for rejecting papal infallibility and insist that God cannot tolerate bad popes, then that throws a bomb into virtually all theological outlooks. We could substitute ‘bad pope’ for ‘bad people’ and then deny God could have any sufficient reason for allowing any sin. With such a claim, all major theistic religions become unravelled. It is unclear as to how Walls can argue God works in mysterious ways in some area (say, evil) but not in others (the election of a pope).

Our synthesis can highlight just how God can use bad popes for a greater purpose. God, from the perspective of eternity, views how every possible state of affairs would unfold. He surveys possible worlds. Like an author, He sees the many ways His book of creation can unfold. He chooses the create accordingly. What this view does really illuminate that vastness of God’s knowledge. God has infallible knowledge of every possible plot line and, when He creates, He sets the plot that He desires into effect. It is – and Walls concedes this – that God’s plan involves a dastardly yet infallible pope. When Walls says this is “unpersuasive”, perhaps he means it is unsatisfactory in the sense that it would not appeal to anyone who is not already convicted of the doctrine of papal infallibility. This is true but also irrelevant to the reconciliation of papal infallibility and character with God’s foreknowledge. So long as we admit that it is possible that God would have a pope that is both depraved and infallible, and

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<sup>607</sup> Walls, ‘Bad Popes’, 92.

that God can work in ways that are beyond our understanding because He has much better insight into how the effects ripple throughout history like a butterfly effect, the appeal to middle knowledge – including the appeal I have made in my meta-vision synthesis – is persuasive in the sense that it resolves any logical incoherence and forces the critic (in this case, Walls) to either commit themselves to untenable bigger claims or to make a concession.

As such, it is clear that our synthesis can be used to support papal infallibility and, indeed, papal selection. The mere fact that God's use of the papacy can be counterintuitive does not suffice to refute the consistency between God's foreknowledge and these peripheral Catholic doctrines. To be clear, this does not entail that one ought to believe in papal infallibility or the selection process. As it stands, Walls' objection has force insofar as it invites us to doubt that God is working through the Papacy in some positive way. The point here is simply that God can – logically – create and tolerate a papacy that is free, infallible, and sinful if He so desires.

### **Hypostatic Union**

The doctrine of the hypostatic union, first defined in terms of *hypostasis* by Apollinaris of Laodicea,<sup>608</sup> has been dogmatically-accepted orthodox Christian belief since the Nicene Creed in 325 CE. While this chapter does not explore the debates surrounding the specific debates surrounding the doctrine, both patristic and later, dissenters from the Nicene view of the hypostatic union will no doubt be able to amend the synthesis to accommodate their particular view (e.g., Apollinarians will find themselves able to expound an account whereby *hypostasis* refers to natures rather than persons).<sup>609</sup> In the orthodox view, the doctrine of the hypostatic union is stated as follows in the Chalcedonian definition of 451 CE:

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<sup>608</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville, 2004), 174.

<sup>609</sup> While I do not develop that thought here, a worthwhile insight into Apollinarian Christologies is found in Timothy John Carter's excellent doctoral thesis: Timothy John Carter, *The Apollinarian Christologies: a Study of the Writings of Apollinaris of Laodicea*, PhD Thesis (Heythrop College, 2007).

Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ is to us One and the same Son, the Self-same Perfect in Godhead, the Self-same Perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man; the Self-same of a rational soul and body; co-essential with the Father according to the Godhead, the Self-same co-essential with us according to the Manhood; like us in all things, sin apart; before the ages begotten of the Father as to the Godhead, but in the last days, the Self-same, for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin Theotokos as to the Manhood; One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis; not as though He was parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as from the beginning the prophets have taught concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hath taught us, and as the Symbol of the Fathers hath handed down to us.<sup>610</sup>

The crux of the doctrine, then, is that Jesus Christ – being God incarnate – was truly God and truly man. This is, as Gerald O’Collins, S.J., has been keen to observe, an ontological Christological claim about who Jesus is.<sup>611</sup> He had two complete natures, but that these natures were in some sense concurring in a single person or *hypostasis*.

This claim has yielded a great deal of scepticism, especially from Muslim critics of the Christian theological doctrine of *kenosis*.<sup>612</sup> However, our synthesis can shed a little light on the doctrine and its application. One issue with the incarnation and the hypostatic union particularly is that it seems to generate contradictions within the person of Christ. For example, if He is God, and

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<sup>610</sup> As quoted at: [\*The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith\*](#), ed. T. Herbert Bindley (London, 1899), 297

<sup>611</sup> Gerald O’Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford, 1995), 19–20.

<sup>612</sup> After all, in Muslim theology, the idea of God ‘self-emptying’ to become incarnate would constitute *shirk*.

God is outside of time, then Jesus cannot be in time – but clearly He is. Does this not yield a contradiction? Another is whether Jesus, as a man, was necessary? For example, could God have occupied the body of any particular individual in order to effect salvation? Could, for example, Ken Dodd, had God so wished, have been the saviour of mankind? On one hand, that Jesus was a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew working as an itinerant Rabbi in and around Judea seems a remarkably contingent fact. None of these details seems necessary to fulfil a soteriological function, yet we cannot seem to separate the man that is Jesus from His divinity because the doctrine insist the natures are indivisible. In this section, I argue that the synthesis, as a metaphor, can help illustrate that there is no contradiction in the doctrine. Further, I argue, that the synthesis yields the theologically acceptable but controversial conclusion that anyone could have been God. Craig calls this “so repugnant as to seem blasphemous” but notice he stops short of calling it blasphemous in actuality.<sup>613</sup> The reason, one suspects, is that the reverse borders on the blasphemous: to insist that God could not have inhabited a different human nature is to minimise the divine power.

In a brace of important articles, Flint argues that the Molinist thesis offers some insight here. He takes as his working assumption that the incarnation entails that God the Son assumed an individual human nature – call it *CHN* – and that *CHN* is unique, metaphysically-speaking. Moreover, Flint is quick to clarify that “the ultimate subject of whatever properties CHN has is not that body-soul composite itself, but rather the Son, the eternal and divine person who is united to and sustains in being this individual human nature.”<sup>614</sup> So, for Flint – indeed, for virtually all orthodox Christians who reject the Nestorian heresy – CHN is the not person of Jesus Christ (the person of Jesus Christ is God the Son) but CHN is rather the body and soul

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<sup>613</sup> William Lane Craig, ‘Flint’s Radical Molinist Christology Not Radical Enough’, *Faith and Philosophy* 23:1 (2006), 59. Flint’s radicalism has also come under fire from R.T. Mullins (see: ‘Flint’s “Molinism and the Incarnation” is too Radical’, *Analytic Theology* 3 (2015), 109-23.

<sup>614</sup> Flint, ‘The Possibilities of Incarnation: Some Radical Molinist Suggestions’, *Religious Studies* 37:3 (2001), 309. Flint likewise explores these ideas in: ‘A Death He Freely Accepted’: Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation’, *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001), 3-20.

that God the Son operated through. It is tempting here to say that CHN and the Son are identical but that would be a misunderstanding for the Son precedes CHN.

Now, if the CHN is the human nature that God the Son has assumed, it seems to follow that CHN cannot sin. That is to say, Christ is not only impeccable in His divine nature, but in His human nature too. This presents a problem: if Christ could not have done otherwise (i.e., could not sin), then He seems to be lacking some freedom and the Biblical accounts of His ministry become nonsensical.<sup>615</sup> For example, in Matthew 4:1-11, the account of Jesus being tempted by the Devil is outlined. In that account, Jesus is tempted by the Devil over the course of forty days and forty nights but rebukes him. The underlying assumption of the narrative is that Jesus' resistance to temptation was a show of faith – indeed, this assumption is so vivid that commentator John Proctor observes:

From our Christian perspective it seems impossible that Jesus could have succumbed and fallen. But if we think too quickly along these lines, we miss the sharpness, the reality, and the attraction of the choices he had to face.<sup>616</sup>

The predicament that CHN throws up is precisely that Jesus had no choice, that – contrary to the Proctor's warning that we should not view the Christ's self-control as inevitable – it was really impossible for Jesus to have succumbed and fallen.

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<sup>615</sup> For example, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."' Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."' Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."' Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.' (Matthew 4:1-11 ESV).

<sup>616</sup> John Proctor, *Matthew: The People's Bible Commentary* (Oxford, 2001), 34.



Molina anticipates this problem and offers a middle knowledge solution, which Flint develops. On the Molinist view, (logically) prior to the creative decree, God recognised the following two counterfactuals are true:

(1) If CHN were placed in lifelong freedom-retaining circumstances C, CHN would freely sin.

(2) If CHN were placed in lifelong freedom-retaining circumstances D, CHN would freely refrain from sinning.<sup>617</sup>

From this, all God has to do – the Molinist argues – is create a world in which circumstances D obtain. In such a case, CHN is free but impeccable. However, in a footnote, Flint’s argument becomes tricky in the details:

Middle knowledge, as we saw, is knowledge of contingent truths. So (1) and (2) are part of middle knowledge only if they are contingently true or false. But neither of these conditionals could be contingent if the circumstances mentioned in their antecedents included CHN’s being assumed, for as we have seen, it is impossible for an assumed human nature to sin. Neither C nor D, then, can include CHN’s being assumed.<sup>618</sup>

In simpler terms, Flint’s point is that CHN had it in its power to sin but were it to exercise that power, then it would never have been assumed. Ergo, it is impossible for an assumed human nature like CHN to sin *once assumed* but the very fact it is assumed is predicated on the contingent counterfactual truth that CHN will not sin. Were it counterfactually true that CHN would sin, then CHN would not have been assumed.

From this, Flint is able to deduce a number of admittedly radical theological claims, the most radical of which is the claim that necessarily, every human nature is possibly assumed. What

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<sup>617</sup> Flint, ‘Possibilities’, 310.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., fn. 12.

this claim entails is that God the Son could have assumed any human nature, that Christ's human nature was in some sense contingent. Flint remarks that our perception of the Incarnation and kenosis is dramatically transformed when we realise that, for instance, Bill Clinton's human nature could have been assumed by God the Son instead of that of some first century fellow, "that this very man is in some other possible world assumed by the Son of God."<sup>619</sup> Anyone could have been God in some possible world. In regards to this claim that anyone could have been God, much criticism is to be expected. In anticipation, let me clarify that the claim is not that God is not necessary or that some form of polytheism is true; rather, it is just that claim that God the Son could have incarnated Himself into any human form, and concurred with any human nature, and then the resultant person – be they male or female, black or white, Jew or Gentile - would be God.

While the Molinist position has value, it is susceptible to an objection that has been launched by Alfred Freddoso. Freddoso does not find Flint's Christological framework to be defensible because Flint's view entails that Christ's human nature could have an independent existence from His divine nature.<sup>620</sup> Freddoso, taking his lead from Ockham and Scotus, is happy to concede Christ can assume a human nature, but he is unwilling to hold that CHN can exist independently of Christ's divine nature. For Freddoso, as for Ockham and Scotus, it is metaphysically impossible for the two to be separated once CHN is assumed. However, as Craig notes, Freddoso's account relies on collapsing counterfactuals and, therefore, cannot be viable.<sup>621</sup> This is because Freddoso's claim that if CHN had not been assumed, then CHN would not have existed is inconsistent with his claim that if CHN were to have sinned, CHN

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>620</sup> Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Human Nature, Potency, and the Incarnation,' *Faith and Philosophy* 3:1 (1986), 27-53. Freddoso's primary source for Scotus here is John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, ed. F. Alluntis and A. B. Wolter (Princeton, 1975) 432-42; for Ockham, it is his *Quodlibeta Septem*, ed. Jonathan C. Wey (St. Bonaventure, 1980), V q. 10.

<sup>621</sup> William Lane Craig, 'Flint's Radical Molinist Christology Not Radical Enough', *Faith and Philosophy* 23:1 (2006), 55-64.

would not have been assumed. The former claim cannot necessarily be true without rendering the latter false, thereby compromising Christ's impeccability. To preserve Christ's impeccability, the latter claim needs to be held as necessarily true, so Freddoso's inability to do that renders his argument void. Craig, admittedly, does not think Flint's view is correct either, but for present purposes it is sufficient to show that Freddoso's claim fails.

A further objection comes from Mark C. Murphy. Murphy admits that the Thomist and Molinist – and so, presumably, also my synthesis – can preserve Christ's libertarian freedom, but that this does not do sufficiently heavy theological lifting for such accounts do not actually explain *why* God ensured the sinlessness of Christ's will. He explains:

[O]ne needs to show why God must not choose to become incarnate with a sinful human will. The question of Christ's impeccability is, primarily, a question of why God has decisive reasons not to become incarnate in a sinful human nature; it is not primarily a question about how God can make sure that no nature in which God becomes incarnate ever sin.<sup>622</sup>

The first thing one must say in response to Murphy is that the objection, respectfully, seems somewhat unfair in that it attacks the views for failing to resolve problems that such views never purported to resolve decisively. It is as though Murphy is attacking a butcher for not cooking the meal. The butcher merely provides the ingredients but it is hardly a defect on her part for not developing the ingredients into something altogether more nourishing. One suspects Murphy might claim that our synthesis could not even provide the ingredients but such a claim, I argue, would be unwarranted.

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<sup>622</sup> Mark C. Murphy, 'Divine Holiness and the Explanation of Christ's Impeccability', *Religious Studies* 57:4 (2021), 683–702; cf. Mark C. Murphy, *Divine Holiness and Divine Action* (Oxford, 2021), 181.

Murphy's challenge is to show why God must not choose to become incarnate with a sinful human will but it seems that this challenge is hardly difficult to meet. The Thomist, Molinist, and I are all taking it for granted that God's nature is intrinsically good, as I have articulated earlier. It is precisely because God is good that He could not become incarnate with a sinful human will. From this fact, we infer Christ's impeccability, rather than mere sinlessness (for while Christ could not sin, the fact He could not sin was the outcome of His free decisions). It would be, as noted, a problem to say Christ lacks any freedom to sin because that would undermine the humanity of Jesus by turning Him into a rather queer mechanical entity that is wholly at odds with the Gospel accounts. However, it might be objected that this fits badly with the claim that that God the Son could have assumed, to return to our earlier example, Bill Clinton's human nature. The argument might look something like this:

1. God cannot assume a sinful nature
2. Bill Clinton's nature is sinful
3. Therefore, God the Son cannot assume Bill Clinton's human nature

This argument is *prima facie* plausible but premise 2 is suspect. Bill Clinton's nature is sinful – a claim that is politically and theologically uncontroversial. This is true. However, this was not necessarily the case. It could have been the case that Clinton's nature were not sinful. God could not assume Clinton's human nature while it was sinful but in any possible world in which it were not sinful, God could assume it. To push this sort of objection, Murphy would need to show that Clinton is sinful in every possible world but – as much as his political detractors might enthuse about that conclusion – that sort of necessity clearly does not exist. Had God wanted to assume the human nature of Bill Clinton, He could have created a world in which Clinton was a freely sinless as the human nature of the first century fellow called 'Yeshua'.

As such, Flint's radical Molinist suggestions equally apply to the synthesis which I have developed at least insofar as middle knowledge is concerned. All the above simply affirms the

utility of middle knowledge and since my account incorporates such middle knowledge, my synthesis provides insight into the Incarnation, the doctrine of kenosis, and hypostatic union. These theological insights highlight the attractiveness of the theory which I am espousing and its utility to philosophers and theologians alike.

## Original Sin

Little has been written about how the Thomist and Molinist approaches divine foreknowledge relate to original sin. Original sin is, for many, an unpalatable doctrine. To understand why, first let us expound what the doctrine says. The doctrine, unsurprisingly, has been defined and characterised in a number of ways, especially along the Catholic-Protestant schismic divide.<sup>623</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I will define the doctrine broadly, drawing on the definitions provided by Martin Luther and Jean Calvin. Philip Melancthon, in the *Augsburg Confession*, summarises the doctrine thusly:

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.<sup>624</sup>

In similar vein, Calvin remarks:

Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's

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<sup>623</sup> These differences are sketched out well in Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (New York, 1989).

<sup>624</sup> As quoted at: 'The Augsburg Confession', in: *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, 1959), 29.

wrath, then also brings forth in us those works that Scripture calls "works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19). And that is what Paul properly and often calls sin. The works that arise from it – such as adulteries, fornications, thefts, hatreds, murders, drunken revelry – he accordingly calls "fruits of sin" (Gal 5:19–21), although they are also commonly called "sins" in Scripture, and even by Paul himself.<sup>625</sup>

Original sin, then, is the idea that all humans are born sinners. They ‘inherit’, almost like genes, sinfulness. Humans are unavoidably born with sin. This is distinct from *concupiscence*, the inclination to sin, in that original sin can – on most views – be erased, whereas humans can never fully shake the inclination to sin.<sup>626</sup> That this inheritance is held to be analogous to genetic transmission in some sense, like a fetus contracting AIDS from its mother, means that one is held to be guilty of sin before even committed any sinful action. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (404) helpfully puts it, original sin is “‘contracted’ and not ‘committed’—a state and not an act.”<sup>627</sup>

Now, this doctrine has been subject to much criticism because it ostensibly violates the Kantian maxim of ‘*ought*’ *implies* ‘*can*’ that we referenced earlier, albeit indirectly.<sup>628</sup> It seems morally dubious that one could be condemned when they have, as an individual moral agent, committed no particular wrongdoing. For example, in criticism of the doctrine, Oliver Crisp, writes:

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<sup>625</sup> This translation is an adaptation of the translation found in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, 1960), 250–51 (2.1.8).

<sup>626</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ed. Geoffrey Chapman (Reprint: London, 2006), 91.

<sup>627</sup> On Kant’s maxim, see: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge, 1998), A548/B576. It has been attributed to Kant as its progenitor widely. See, for example: W. A. Frankena, ‘Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy’, in: A.I. Melden (ed.), *Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Seattle, 1958), 59.

<sup>628</sup> I say ‘indirectly’ because the doctrine does not hold that one *ought* to have done otherwise. Adam, the progenitor of the deadly disease, ought to have done otherwise, but the doctrine by no means imposes that expectation of others.

[I]t is necessarily morally wrong to punish the innocent, and I am innocent of Adam's sin (I did not commit his sin or condone it). It is also immoral because the guilt of one person's sin does not transfer to another (I am not guilty of committing Adam's sin).<sup>629</sup>

In similar vein, even the late Wolfhart Pannenberg eschewed the notion of original sin, remarking that “it is impossible for me to be held jointly responsible, as though I were a joint cause, for an act that another did many generations ago and in a situation radically different from mine.”<sup>630</sup> In his 1924 Bampton Lectures at the University of Oxford, the Anglican theologian Norman Powell Williams candidly confessed that the Apostle Paul does not really attempt to “explain how it is that a state for which we are not responsible manifests itself in acts for which we are, or why a guiltless malady should issue in symptoms to which guilt attaches – problems which have baffled the philosophers, theologians, alienists, and penologists of all ages.”<sup>631</sup> The criticism of Crisp and Pannenberg has much merit and reflects a growing trend of re-thinking the doctrine in both Catholic and Protestant thought over the twentieth century, as evidenced by Williams' remark.

However, in this section, I argue that God can use original sin and His foreknowledge for a greater moral purpose, thereby undermining the sting of the objection.

Augustine, in his discussion of *originale peccatum*, offers an interesting insight into exactly what Adam's original sin was in his 118<sup>th</sup> Epistle to Dioscorus:

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<sup>629</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, 'On Original Sin', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17:3 (2015), 252-66.

<sup>630</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York, 1985), 124.

<sup>631</sup> Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London, 1927), 133-34.

[T]he first sin, i.e. the first voluntary loss, is rejoicing in its own power: for it rejoices in something less than would be the source of its joy if it rejoiced in the power of God, which is unquestionably greater.<sup>632</sup>

What is interesting here is that, for Augustine, the original sin – and subsequently all sin – is voluntary. Jairzinho Lopes Pereira observes: “From his earliest writings, Augustine argued that no other cause for sin can be found apart from free will. Sin is nothing else but a *motus auersionis* of the will in relation to what is good.”<sup>633</sup>

Developing Augustine’s view, perhaps we can re-define or re-specify original sin thusly: that we are imbued with original sin is merely a reflection of the fact we, like Adam, would sin of our own volition, since all sin is voluntary. It is scarcely like God convicts us in our innocence for He has prior knowledge of our future guilt. This opens the door to our synthesis quite nicely. If we may return to the book authorship analogy of our synthesis, we can illustrate how it would apply.

In Genesis, Adam sins. We, in some sense, inherit that sin. We inherit it as part of the human race. It is true that our humanness is what makes us sinful, not necessarily, but universally. This is because prior to creation, God knew that we would all freely sin. In other words: the universal guilt of mankind is not derived from Adam’s particular sin, but rather we inherit Adam’s inevitable propensity to sin because we are – like him – wholly human. This makes perfect sense of Paul’s claim that “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”<sup>634</sup>

Adam was the first sinner but universal death came because of universal sin, not Adam’s

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<sup>632</sup> Augustine, ‘Letter 118’, *New Advent* <<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102118.htm>>, (accessed: 12/09/2022).

<sup>633</sup> Jarzinho Lopes Pereira, *Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther on Original Sin and Justification of the Sinner* (Gottingen, 2013), 64.

<sup>634</sup> Romans 5:12 (NIV).



particular sin. Thus, when we conceive of God creating the universe that He did, we see that from His position in eternity, He saw that if He were to create our world, everyone would freely sin. Thus, while as characters in the Book of Creation, we cannot see our future sins, God – as the author of Creation – sees our future sins as a result of our concupiscence and holds us accountable for them.

Once we articulate original sin in this way, the criticism of Crisp, Pannenberg, and the like become innocuous, for there is no attribution of moral guilt without moral agency. On the contrary, it is that God knows of our future sins that we are in some sense born condemned. For while we may appear innocent at T<sub>0</sub>, we are judged based on our whole span of life, not just the first moment. It is precisely because the synthesis that we have adopted preserves free will – and thus moral agency – that enables it to give credence to the doctrine of original sin.

It may well be objected to this that this is a perfectly adequate explanation for people who go on to develop moral agency but it fails as a solution for those who never become capable of moral agency. Persons who die in infancy (including in-utero) or the permanently cognitively impaired cannot be held to be sinners on the basis of some future agency if they never obtain such agency. This is a valid criticism. *Prima facie*, our synthesis will struggle with this as it relies on creaturely freedom. It is designed only as an account of how creatures can be free while God knows the future and thus its applications seem only applicable to free creatures. It seems to me, however, that this objection is resolvable via a modest revision. We can view original sin as inherited in the sense that all humans that can freely sin will freely sin. In other words, our earlier statement that ‘our humanness is what makes us sinful’ can be amended to the claim that it is our creaturely freedom as humans that makes us sinful. It is that capacity which makes sinfulness a universal fact among those humans with free agency. Thus, we may say that original sin, as universal sin, refers to being universal among humans with free agency. In other words,

babies and the retarded are exempt from original sin. Does this entail Jesus alone was not sinless? It entails Jesus was the only person with free will ever to be sinless.

I see no reason why this account would not be defensible. That is to say, it is entirely possible that God created the world taking creaturely freedom into account via His foreknowledge and assigning guilt based on the sin that that creaturely freedom yields. Thus, there is universal guilt that is assigned to all free creatures. This is what we must mean by ‘original sin’ if we are to make it plausible. That is not incompatible with the claim that God chose to make some non-free persons, or rather, persons who will never be free in the sense of exercising moral agency.

The only foreseeable objection will be that this notion of original sin is so diluted that it amounts to nothing more than the claim that if you sin, as a free agent, you are condemned as a sinner. If you do not sin, you are not a sinner. It does amount to nothing more than that claim but original sin, properly construed in Augustinian terms as voluntary, cannot mean anything more radical than this. In fact, at the risk of pushing Thomistic thought quite far, this squares neatly with Aquinas’ idea of original sin as, formally, a privation of original justice.<sup>635</sup> For original justice is alignment of the will with God, original sin creates misalignment. However, it is precisely that God knows we will sin in future, and His prior condemnation of that, that explains such alignment and privation. For our privation, our original sin, derives from our will (i.e. our freedom). If there is no will, then there can be no privation to create misalignment. Babies, for example, cannot fall away from original justice into original sin because they never had the will to align with God in the first place. The Bible indicates this in Deuteronomy 1:39.<sup>636</sup> Thus, it seems that the synthesis need not concern itself with explaining these cases that

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<sup>635</sup> Aquinas, *ST I-II*, Q.82, A1.

<sup>636</sup> “And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.” (ESV)

do not involve creaturely freedom; it is perfectly sufficient that it explains how original sin would work once creaturely freedom is guaranteed.

## The Hiddenness of God

This doctrine of foreknowledge that I am defending also explains why God allows himself to be hidden. In this section, I outline the problems of divine hiddenness and explain how the synthesis can be of some utility.

When Jesus was crucified, at the ninth hour, His last words included a cry of intense spiritual agony: “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’<sup>637</sup>

In that moment, Jesus felt one manifestation of what theologians have come to term ‘the hiddenness of God’. He could no longer feel the presence of God the Father. God was, in some sense, hidden from Jesus as He bore the weight of sin.<sup>638</sup> Thus, the problem of divine hiddenness is, at its heart, the idea that the ostensible absence of God’s presence is something that requires explaining.

Following Daniel Howard-Snyder and Adam Green, and Veronika Weidner, I think it is important to distinguish between two different problems of divine hiddenness.<sup>639</sup> The first is *existential*. This refers to the *experience* of God’s absence or *non-experience* of God’s presence because the existential sense is, properly construed, a sense of separation from God. Michael Rea helpfully characterises it as “the elusiveness of God’s comforting presence when

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<sup>637</sup> Mark 15:34; cf. Matthew 27:47.

<sup>638</sup> This is the traditional understanding of Christ’s agony on the cross. Mark Stibbe has captured this notion succinctly: “On the Cross, Jesus felt that his Father was no longer there, no longer close to Him. All the sins of the world had been placed upon his shoulders and he could no longer sense his Father’s intimate presence. We know that sin separates human beings from God. On the Cross, our sin separated Jesus from [the sense of] his Father’s love.” (Mark Stibbe, *Your Father: What Every Heart Needs to Know* (Oxford, 2010), 273).

<sup>639</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder and Adam Green, ‘Divine Hiddenness’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-hiddenness/#Bib>>, (accessed: 06/09/2022); Veronika Weidner, *Examining Schellenberg’s Hiddenness Argument* (Cham, 2018), introduction, especially 18.

we are afraid or in pain, the palpable and devastating experience of divine absence and abandonment.<sup>640</sup> The Bible, and Christian testimony, is littered with the existential sort of divine hiddenness.<sup>641</sup> The theme of hiddenness in the Hebrew Bible has been brilliantly catalogued by Semitic languages scholar, Joel Burnett.<sup>642</sup> As the implications of my synthesis for this sort of problem are more pastoral than philosophical, I will not draw them out at length here. Rather, in exploring how the synthesis interacts with the philosophical problem, I will make passing remarks about how this might aid with the existential problem.

As just indicated, the second sort of divine hiddenness is philosophical, specifically epistemological. It refers not to the emotional or pastoral problem of God's hiddenness, but the implications of this ostensible hiddenness for belief. The most serious implications of this, arguably, are that either God does not exist or that God is not loving in some sense (or worse, God is pernicious, thus generating a divine problem of evil). This argument really found its pedigree in Nietzsche but since 1993, this line of argument has been most authoritatively and prolifically taken by John L. Schellenberg.<sup>643</sup> For example, Schellenberg develops the following argument:

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<sup>640</sup> Michael C. Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford, 2018), 3.

<sup>641</sup> For example, Helen de Cruz observes that for Mother Teresa this took the form of "spiritual dryness" over the course of many years. See: Helen de Cruz, 'Divine Hiddenness and the Cognitive Science of Religion', in: Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 2015), 53. B. A. Gerrish finds examples of this existential angst in Luther and Calvin too. See: B. A. Gerrish, "'To the Unknown God': Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', *Journal of Religion* 53:3 (1973), 263-92.

<sup>642</sup> Joel S. Burnett, *Where is God? Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, 2010); cf. Samuel Ballentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1983).

<sup>643</sup> J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, 1993). Schellenberg has followed up this important work with innumerable replies. See the *SEP* entry of 'Divine Hiddenness' for a full bibliography. On Nietzsche, Nietzsche writes: "A god who is all-knowing and all powerful and who does not make sure his creatures understand his intention – how can that be a god of goodness? Who allows countless doubts and dubieties to persist, for thousands of years, as though the salvation of mankind was unaffected by them, and who on the other hand holds out the prospect of frightful consequences if any mistake is made as to the nature of the truth? Would he not be a cruel god if he possessed the truth and could behold mankind miserably tormenting itself over the truth?" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudmarie Clark and Brian Leiter (Cambridge, 1997), 52-53). For a brief but worthwhile discussion of this tension noted by Nietzsche, see: Natasha Crain, 'Why does God seem "Hidden"?', in: Joseph M. Holden (ed.), *The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics* (Eugene, 2018), 81-82. For a worthwhile discussion of how it relates to the problem of evil, a worthwhile discussion can be found at: Michael J. Murray, 'Seek and You Will Find', in: Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason* (New York, 1994), 68ff.

(1) Necessarily, if God exists, then God perfectly loves such finite persons as there may be.

(2) Necessarily, if God perfectly loves such finite persons as there may be, then, for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, God is at *t* open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship with *S* at *t*.

(3) Necessarily, if for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, God is at *t* open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship with *S* at *t*, then, for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, it is not the case that *S* is at *t* nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

(4) There is at least one capable finite person *S* and time *t* such that *S* is or was at *t* nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

(5) So, it is not the case that God exists.<sup>644</sup>

In this section, I attempt to undermine the sting of this argument by appealing to the synthesis in two respects. First, I argue that (2) seems to overlook God's externality to time, and – furthermore – the argument seems to overlook the counterfactual knowledge of God and the libertarian freedom of creatures. Second, in resisting Schellenberg's argument, I will show how divine hiddenness, as construed through my synthesis, may be a necessary condition for preserving human freedom.

In regards to (2) overlooking the divine mind's externality to time, note the premise is temporally-loaded: "Necessarily, if God perfectly loves such finite persons as there may be, then, for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, God is at *t* open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship with *S* at *t*."

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<sup>644</sup> Taken from above cited SEP with numeration altered.

How can our synthesis help rebut this premise? First, it denies that God is at  $t$  open to being in a relationship with  $S$  at  $t$ . Recall that since we have a strong Thomistic commitment to God's timelessness, it does not even make sense to say God is at  $t$  or acts at  $t$ . Rather, God is timeless or timelessly acts so as to produce effects at  $t$ . The person  $S$  is at  $t$ , granted, but since the premise is conjunctive, the premise as a whole is rendered false by God's timelessness.

One obvious retort here would be to rewrite the premise to accommodate God's timelessness and insist it has no negative impact on the argument. For example, (2) could become:

(2') Necessarily, if God perfectly loves such finite persons as there may be, then, for any capable finite person  $S$  and time  $t$ , God is timelessly open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship with  $S$  at  $t$  in the temporal mode.

I think this is a fairly potent response. The advocate of the synthesis might become too reactive at this point and deny that God can have any relationship that traverses the modes of being but that is a theologically unacceptable conclusion. As such, (2') is more difficult to deny. If that is so, the worry that Schelling raises remains.

However, the worry can be abated. The idea, as I interpret Schellenberg, is that if God exists, then there can never be any non-resistant non-belief. In other words, God's existence is incompatible with reasonable non-belief.<sup>645</sup> However, even (2') does not seem to warrant that concern because of something that philosophers of religion have increasingly come to hold: namely, the claim that if God were to reveal Himself too much, it would compromise creaturely freedom.<sup>646</sup> To illustrate, suppose I tell you that you have won the lottery before you

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<sup>645</sup> I introduce 'reasonable' here quite deliberately. Schellenberg does not seem concerned so much with unreasonable non-belief, as evidenced in his 'On Reasonable Nonbelief and Perfect Love: Replies to Lehe and Henry', *Faith and Philosophy* 22:3 (2005), 330–342. An example I could suggest here is a solipsist. Suppose someone sees God and is quickly compelled to believe that God exists, just as any reasonable person might look at the external world and be compelled to believe that it exists. It could well be that someone is solipsistic towards that experience of God but that would not be reasonable and, if I interpret him correctly, would not be what Schellenberg has in mind.

<sup>646</sup> The bibliography here could be extensive but a few examples include Michael J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford, 2008), 179; John Hick, *Evil and the God of*

have checked your numbers, you may well be inclined to believe me – depending on how reliable and competent you regard me as being. However, there is still room from plenty of doubt. You will not, one hopes, spend your savings based on my word alone. However, once you have received the sum of money from your win, you will have no room for any serious doubt that you are the winner. The balance on the account statement is there is black and white, as surely as the external world exists. Accordingly, you will feel quite comfortable undertaking new extravagant expenditures. What do we deduce from this? First, that our actions are shaped by our knowledge. This is uncontroversial. Second, that evidence can compel belief. I see the balance on the statement, therefore I believe I am the winner. I see the copy of Jan Łukasiewicz’s *Elements of Mathematical Logic* on my desk, therefore I believe the book exists. These beliefs are not subject to my volition; I am epistemically compelled. In like manner, then, it seems plausible to say that if God were to reveal Himself sufficiently to the world, to those of us with creaturely freedom, then we would be compelled to believe in Him and our creaturely freedom. Harry Frankfurt’s distinction of desires is perhaps of some value here. Frankfurt speaks of ‘desires’ and explicitly neglects discussion of volitional concepts such as choices for the sake of simplicity,<sup>647</sup> but we can bring them into play here. According to Frankfurt, we have two levels of desires:

Human beings are not alone in having desires and motives, or in making choices. They share these things with members of certain other species, some of whom even appear to engage in deliberation and to make decisions based upon prior thought. It seems to be peculiarly characteristic of humans, however, that they are able to form what I shall call “second-order desires” or “desires of the second order.” Besides wanting and choosing

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*Love* (New York, 1966), 278ff; Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* (Milton Keynes, 2013), 258-62; and Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>647</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’, *The Journal of Philosophy* 68:1 (1971), fn 2.

and being moved *to do* this or that, men may also want to have or not to have certain desires or motives [...] Many animals appear to have the capacity for what I shall call “first-order desires” or “desires of the first order,” which are simply desires to do or not to do one thing or another. No animal other than man, however, appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires.<sup>648</sup>

What I am claiming here is that the voidance of divine hiddenness could eliminate our capacity for second-order volition. We can no longer ‘desire’ or choose God since we are unable to reflectively come to these decisions. This is particularly troublesome from a theological perspective, especially in relation to the problem articulated by Nietzsche, because traditional theistic perspectives assume, in some sense, that desiring God is a choice. Worse, our first order desires are also potentially done away with. To illustrate, a first order desire might be to pray, as opposed to the second order desire, to desire to desire to pray (sic.) If we are so compelled to acknowledge God’s presence and being, then it is plausible that would entail that we are forced to pray to Him, similar to how we cannot help but admire someone of an impressive character. In that scenario, the non-hiddenness of God can be seen to remove our first order desire, further compromising our choices and creaturely freedom.

We can couch the idea that God has morally sufficient reasons to remain hidden in a range of hypotheses. We have couched it in creaturely freedom, but Kierkegaard explained it in terms

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<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 6–7. I am myself not entirely on-board with Frankfurt’s empirical claim that non-human animals deliberate since that term seems to imply the sort of reflectiveness that Frankfurt himself admits belongs to second-order desire. Deliberation is a reflective process. Yet Frankfurt clearly must take the term to mean ‘chooses between more than one option’, which is unobjectionable, and his overall framework is unaffected by this semantic quibble. Frankfurt’s position has been widely discussed and criticized (see: Christopher Norris, ‘Frankfurt on Second-Order Desires and the Concept of a Person’, *Prolegomena* 9:2 (2010), 199–242) but it remains a useful conceptual tool for our purposes.



of complacency or superficiality, as Schellingberg notes.<sup>649</sup> We could also, following the suggestion of Travis Dumsday, perhaps the world's leading authority on divine hiddenness, explain it in terms that belief at some time could lead to later rejection of God.<sup>650</sup> What is crucial, however, is that our synthesis provides the framework for this. First, it undermines Schellingberg's argument's temporal assumptions. Second, it refutes even (2') by highlighting that, by His foreknowledge, God could have morally sufficient reasons for remaining hidden. It explains why, as Richard H. Corrigan has noted, "[a] physical manifestation of God's existence is no guarantee that we would be brought any closer to accomplishing this goal" of proper relationship with the divine.<sup>651</sup>

It does this because we can suppose that God, by His middle knowledge, knows how His creatures would react if He were to reveal Himself too much. That is to say, middle knowledge provides the framework for this our view that hiddenness is necessary to preserve freedom. For if God did not know how we would respond to His revealing Himself, then He would be incapable of preserving our freedom. If we were to adopt, say, an open-theist view, then the preservation of human freedom would become a guessing game for God.

Our synthesis also holds a couple of other benefits. First, from a theological perspective, these first order desires are especially important to God in all the Abrahamic religions. In preserving these, we preserve much of what these Abrahamic religions espouse. For example, the Qur'an clearly refers to agency over desires in relation to *shirk*:

Have you seen 'O Prophet' the one who has taken their own desires as their god? Will you then be a keeper over them?<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness*, 159; cf. Søren Kierkegaard, 'Postscript', in: Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (Oxford, 1973), 224.

<sup>650</sup> Travis Dumsday, 'Divine Hiddenness and Creaturely Resentment', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 72:1 (2012) 41–51.

<sup>651</sup> Richard H. Corrigan, *Why Hidden? Divine Hiddenness, Love, and Revelation* (New York, 2007), 14.

<sup>652</sup> Sura Al-Furqan 25:43 (أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا)

What do we see here? We see that the major Abrahamic religions have placed an emphasis on both *desiring* God but also *desiring to desire* God. Underlying this is a commitment to agency over desire. As the surah above indicates, Allah reprimands the ones who, as free agents, deify their own desires above desiring to desire Allah. Any view that a scripturally-minded Abrahamic theist takes must take agency over desire seriously, and the synthesis which I have offered enables her to do that within the framework of providence. In showing how the synthesis is compatible with divine hiddenness, and that divine hiddenness is necessary for human freedom if God exists, we also highlight how our synthesis' preservation of agency over desire comports well with core theological commitments across the Abrahamic religions

Secondly, our view keeps God firmly outside of time. This is, in the spirit of candour, a weaker consideration for the synthesis' theological application but it does comport better with divine hiddenness than a temporal view. The hiddenness of God is, in a sense, the separateness of God. Lucian Blaga, the great Romanian polymath, provides some insight here in emphasising the link between God's transcendence and hiddenness.<sup>653</sup> This link is also alluded to by Pannenberg in relation to divine decrees, albeit in a very underdeveloped form.<sup>654</sup> The idea here is that if God is outside of time, outside of our mode of existence, then He is inherently more hidden than He would be if He were in our mode of existence. As noted, this is not a decisive point but it seems that this is a plausible consideration in unravelling the *sense* of God's hiddenness. It *prima facie* makes more sense that a hidden God would inhabit a more distant, hidden mode of existence. The obvious objection here is that God's being temporal does not necessarily entail His revealing Himself in a way that violates our epistemological freedom. This is, of course, true. There is, to my knowledge, no definitive argument that God's temporality is incompatible with His hiddenness. However, this does not negate the intuition

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<sup>653</sup> Michael S. Jones, *The Metaphysics of Religion: Lucian Blaga and Contemporary Philosophy* (Teaneck, 2006), 214.

<sup>654</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* I (London, 2004), 405ff.

that timelessness better coheres with the idea that God is opting to retain a certain distance from His creation to remain hidden to a certain degree. It may well be that this intuition is wrong but it seems to have some weight to it and therefore is a worthwhile consideration.

A further objection to this point might come from Karl Barth. For Barth, God is not a transcendent *being* but a transcendent *happening* and that this entails temporality. What does Barth mean here?<sup>655</sup> Namely, that God's transcendence is something that happens between Him and the creature; it is dynamic. This view is also associated with Robert Jenson but it is worth noting that Jenson's view ultimately divorces from Barth's over this distinction.<sup>656</sup> Audy Santoso summarises Barth's view as follows:

[T]he hiddenness of God is located in his temporal transcendence. Such that, even though we live in the same temporal metaphysics with God we cannot keep up with the moral intention nor fully understand what God is up to next. His life is temporal infinity, as such God remains transcendent – in temporality, hidden from us who are finite and sinful.<sup>657</sup>

This view, which bears some similarity to Brian Leftow's infinite temporality view,<sup>657</sup> pushes back against my thesis that timelessness fits hiddenness better. We can imagine Barth positing the following counter-consideration: the mode of existence is, in a sense, irrelevant to the hiddenness. What is relevant is the infinitude and perfection of God as conceived within a Trinitarian framework. This seems to be Jenson's line in part, though his approach differs from Barth. Thus far, this is not objectionable. I can agree that God's hiddenness is a problem of

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<sup>655</sup> This divergence is well explained in a commentary provided by Adrian Langdon (see: Adrian Langdon, *God the Eternal Contemporary: Trinity, Eternity, and Time in Karl Barth* (Eugene, 2012), 23-26).

<sup>656</sup> Audy Santoso, *Union with God: An Assessment of the Deification (Theosis) in the Theologies of Robert Jenson and John Calvin* (Leiden, 2021), 67. On Jenson's view, see: God after God, 96; and especially Jenson's systematic works: Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1 (New York, 1997), 217ff and 233-34. On Barth, see: Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zurich, 1940), 2/1: 685-86.

<sup>657</sup> Leftow's view is articulated in Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford, 2012); and, more concretely, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, 1991). I should stress here that Leftow quasi-temporal view is not without difference but it is similar in its blending of the temporal and the transcendent.

infinitude and perfection but it seems to be that the mode of existence is still pertinent. Let's say whether God is timeless or temporal, He can seem equally hidden either way. This seems plausible on the face of it. However, if we ask *why* God is hidden, it seems that God's hiddenness is exacerbated by His inaccessibility. We can then ask, which mode is more accessible: the temporal or the timeless? The answer, surely, is the latter since we occupy the former. As such, God's hiddenness is somehow exacerbated by His being timeless. This, again, is not a definitive argument, but a worthwhile consideration insofar our timeless conception of God and His knowledge coheres better with the reality of God's hiddenness and inaccessibility.<sup>658</sup>

In short, the Thomist-Molinist synthesis that I have proposed provides a potent response to the problem of divine hiddenness *qua* a philosophical problem, but it also provides some insight into the *sense* that God is distant or hidden through reference to the idea of inaccessibility.

Returning back momentarily to the *existential* problem of hiddenness, we see how the synthesis tempers Ray S. Yeo's concern that "the existential problem of divine hiddenness could potentially serve as a source of blindness to the goodness of God."<sup>659</sup> Far from being indicative of an absence of divine love, the synthesis lays the framework for a theodicy that demonstrates that God's hiddenness is a reflection of His goodness and love. That is not, of course, to say that God's love necessitates hiddenness *simpliciter*, but that it necessitates hiddenness if creaturely freedom is to be preserved. As such, the application of our synthesis to divine hiddenness as a theological problem is enormously fruitful.

## Prayer

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<sup>658</sup> I do not mean by this that God is inaccessible in absolute terms since that that would preclude any relationship. Rather, it simply means that we cannot 'see' or 'access' God in any physical manifestation. He is 'hidden' but to say He is 'inaccessible' is to make the stronger claim that even if He were unhidden, He would not be accessible as those with whom we have other relationships are.

<sup>659</sup> Ray S. Yeo, *Renewing Spiritual Perception with Jonathan Edwards: Contemporary Philosophy and the Theological Psychology of Transforming Grace*. (Abingdon, 2016), 171.

Prayer is at the heart of much religious life. Jesus, for instance, spent considerable periods of time in solitary prayer.<sup>660</sup> Likewise in Islam, Muslims are required (*fard*) to pray five times daily in performance of *salah*. While it is, in its most basic form, ‘talking with God’, one of the more comprehensive definitions of prayer comes from Joseph Roosevelt Rogers Sr.:

Prayer is communicating or dialoguing with God in making requests, supplications, giving thanksgivings, and interceding on behalf of others. Prayer is the meeting together of the human soul (spirit) with the spirit of God [...] in direct address to him. Prayer may be oral or mental, occasional or constant.<sup>661</sup>

Given the profound centrality of prayer life to religious faith, our synthesis should be able to shed some light on it. If our synthesis turns out not to be compatible with a coherent notion of prayer, it can be dismissed on theological grounds. There are two major objections to prayer:<sup>662</sup>

First, how can a timeless God answer prayer, especially *in real time*?

Second, if God’s will is fixed, how can our prayer be efficacious?

In regards to the first question, this question concerns the *when* of prayer. For the open theist, the answer to *when* God hears our prayers is straightforward: when the prayer is prayed. For every prayer prayed at time *t*, God hears the prayer at *t*, and responds (if He responds) at or after *t*. However, this straightforwardness is not open to us since God does not reside in time on our view. Rather, He is timeless. What that entails is that God hears out prayers timelessly but produces the effects of His response temporally. Middle knowledge is also key here. For

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<sup>660</sup> Luke 5:16 (ESV), for example, reads: “But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.” An interesting chapter on Jesus’ prayer life with the Father is: Trevor Bucknell, *Jesus, the Prophets, and the End of the World: An Introduction to Biblical Eschatology* (Eugene, 2016), chapter 9.

<sup>661</sup> Joseph Roosevelt Rogers, *Defining, Understanding, and Applying Prayer* (Independent, 2016), 8, cf. 8-12.

<sup>662</sup> James M. Arcadi, ‘Prayer in Analytic Theology’, in: Ashley Cocksworth and John C. McDowell (eds.), *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Prayer* (London, 2022), 543ff.

God's production of a temporal effect is contingent upon the counterfactual effect of the answered or unanswered prayer. Consider the following example. Suppose in 1997, Tony prays he will become Prime Minister. God does not hear this prayer in 1997 but does so eternally. However, because He knows the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, He can from eternity decide to actualise the possible world in which Blair becomes Prime Minister in 1997. So God does hear our prayers in *real time* in the sense that there is an immediacy to it (for if God's eternal mode is all-present, it must be all-immediate), but it is not the case that God is reactive in His answers to prayer on the temporal series. In contrast to this view, Michael F. Bird has argued that its emphasis on God's reactivity is a possible strength of open theism, writing:

Open theism gains currency when classical theists overemphasize God's interactive connection with his creatures. While God is indeed proactive in his plan (e.g., Ephesians 1:1-22), he is equally interactive (e.g., Exodus 32:1-14) and in some sense even reactive (e.g., Jonah 3:10). God's answer to prayer, after all, can be likened to a divine improvisation based on God's knowledge of all possibilities and the changelessness of his character where he genuinely responds to our petitions in his infinite wisdom and grace.<sup>663</sup>

Bird is right, undoubtedly, to stress that open theists will count their emphasis on God's reactivity in *real time* as a strength of their view, but under my synthesis, classical theists do not need to understate God's reactivity. My synthesis allows God to be reactive but He is not reactive on the temporal series but rather reactive to what He knows, from eternity, His

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<sup>663</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Grand Rapids, 2020), 796. Note: Bird then rejects the open theism position. See also: Graham Cole, 'The Living God: Anthropomorphic or Anthropopathic', *Reformed Theological Review* 59:1 (2000), 24-25.

creatures will do. As such, my synthesis accomplishes a recognition of the importance of divine reactivity without needing to sacrifice God's knowledge of the future, as the open-theists do.

That said, the view I have outlined in response generates some quirky features.<sup>664</sup> Suppose a cancer patient is riddled with the disease at  $t1$  but recovers at  $t2$ , does it make sense for me to pray retroactively for recovery at  $t3$ ? This admittedly appears counter-intuitive. If I were to visit an oncology ward and offer to pray for that patient once their cancer has gone into complete remission, I would be greeted with a look of bemusement. That bemusement would be amplified if I then, at  $t4$ , attributed the healing to God's response to the prayer that I made. Yet this is precisely what the defender of the synthesis must hold. Perhaps this entailment is sufficient in quirkiness to constitute an objection.

Indeed, we find a form of this objection even in the medical literature. In 2001, Leonard Leibovici, an Israeli physician, published a spoof study which purported to show that retroactive prayer produced beneficial health outcomes within a cohort of patients that were hospitalized with a blood infection.<sup>665</sup> His explanation for the effect in the parody study was "we cannot assume *a priori* that time is linear, as we perceive it, or that God is limited by linear time, as we are."<sup>666</sup> While the study is a joke, this latter explanation is sensible and insightful – we should not be making *a priori* assumptions.

How might we respond to the objection? First, we can respond by observing that the temporal ordering of the events involves no logical or metaphysical impossibility for even if one holds retroactive causation is impossible, the example given does not even involve retroactive causation in any meaningful sense. How can that be when the event at  $t4$  clearly has a causal

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<sup>664</sup> This quirkiness is not limited to my own view. Kevin Timpe has found that a range of views about God's relationship with time support this entailment. See: Kevin Timpe, 'Prayers for the Past', *Religious Studies* 41:3 (2005), 305–22.

<sup>665</sup> Leonard Leibovici, 'Effects of Remote, Retroactive Intercessory Prayer on Outcomes in Patients with Bloodstream Infection: Randomised Controlled Trial', *British Medical Journal* 323:7327 (2001), 1450–51.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, 1450.

influence on the healing process that occurs between  $t1$  and  $t2$ ? The reason, as explained above, is that God's acts are timeless but the effects of His acts are temporally located. While the time at which we pray is of importance to us, it is not important to God in terms of His hearing it precisely because it transcends the temporal series. A visual illustration can clarify this. Suppose you send an email at 1pm, another at 3pm, and another at 5pm. The recipient of all these emails logs on at 6pm. When the recipient opens their email, they will see all of the messages – be they petitions, updates, requests, etc. – at the same time, although they all came at different times. The recipient receives them all as present and can take account of all of them. While this analogy is far from imperfect, construing prayer as being like email in this sense illustrates how God receives our prayers.<sup>667</sup> Likewise, suppose further that the recipient drafts replies to all the emails at the same time but pre-schedules the delivery such that the recipients receive their replies at different times. In like manner, God responds from the eternal present simultaneously but we see the effects of the response at specific, differentiated times in the temporal sequence.

The second reply to the objection should be that the synthesis that I have laid out provides the perfect explanation for this in that God knows in advance how I will pray in the future and can take that into account. As indicated earlier, by utilising the concept of middle knowledge with an emphasis on eternity – bringing Molina and Aquinas closer together – the mechanism by which God considers prayer is elucidated. God knows how I will pray because the plotline of creation has already been determined based on His choice of world actualisation. In other words, the charge that God cannot respond to prayer if He is timeless is wrong because His timelessness is integral to His responsiveness.

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<sup>667</sup> I took this idea of prayer being like email from Colin Leach. On this, see: Colin Leach, *Man's Destiny* (Bloomington, 2012), 80.



Thirdly and finally in relation to the question of how a timeless God can hear prayer, it should be noted that to deny that God takes into account future actions is to assert that God acts on incomplete knowledge. This is a more tendentious point but a defensible one. The argument, crudely stated, can be formulated as follows:

1. If God does not know the future, He would have incomplete knowledge.
2. God, by definition, cannot incomplete knowledge.
3. Therefore, God must know the future.
4. If God knows the future, He must be timeless.
5. Therefore, God must be timeless.

This argument is more aimed at open-theist perspectives, as the first premiss indicates. The idea of the argument is to show that timelessness, omniscience, and prayer are tied up. If you want to affirm that God has not got incomplete knowledge (i.e. knowledge of all prayers ever prayed, being prayed, or to be prayed), then He must be timeless. There is a sort of triad whereby God's timelessness, omniscience, and prayer cease to make sense without it each other. For example, consider the death of Lazarus in the New Testament.<sup>668</sup> If we assume, *arguendo*, the open theist view, we get a rather odd situation whereby God lets Lazarus die *without* even taking Jesus' posthumous prayer into account. After all, in the Johannine narrative, Jesus prays to say "Father, I thank you that you have heard me."<sup>669</sup> If Jesus' prayer is to be efficacious, and to be truly heard, then it must also be the case that God takes that prayer into account to retroactively heal Lazarus. If we hold, as the open theist does, that God does not know the future, or – as a weaker claim – does not allow future prayers to be taken into account in His decision-making, then it follows that God is decision-making without the set of contingent information from creation. In other words, His decision-making is based on

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<sup>668</sup> John 11:1-44 (ESV).

<sup>669</sup> John 11:41b (ESV).

incomplete knowledge as it omits the knowledge of future prayers, including Jesus'. From a theological perspective, this seems odd. As such, the timelessness of God and His foreknowledge as outlined in the synthesis coheres better with the notion of prayer.

One objection here is to say that the argument is effective against open theists but not temporalists who believe that God is temporal with knowledge of the future. There is no reason why God could not temporally know about Jesus' future prayer. William Lane Craig's unconventional view could fit the bill here. As stated in an earlier chapter, Craig argues that God is timeless *sans* creation but timeless *cum* creation which, following R. T. Mullins, I take to be similar to T. J. Mawson's divine atemporalism insofar as Mawson's atemporalism looks remarkably temporalistic upon analysis.<sup>670</sup> Yet let us focus on Craig's view. Craig could retort that God's timelessness prior to creation is equivalent to the synthesis in its accounting for prayer. This is perfectly true since Craig's view of God *prior* (in a causal sense) to creation is not dissimilar to the view postulated in the synthesis. Craig defends the coherence of retroactive prayer.<sup>671</sup> Yet note that Craig's view only accounts for prayer because of its subscription to divine timelessness. The timelessness is central and without it, Craig's view would likewise be undermined – albeit modestly – by this objection.

This discussion of efficaciousness leads us to the latter question of the fixity of God's will, this problem also raises issues for those who believe God is eternal and unchanging. Consider an example. Suppose some husband, Atticus, finds that his wife, Philomena, is mortally ill. As a result of his faith, he prays to God to heal her. Several weeks later, Philomena expires. For the sake of argument, let us assume it was God's will that Philomena died. This raises a question: Was Atticus' prayer efficacious or even *potentially* efficacious? On one hand, many theologians

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<sup>670</sup> R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford, 2016), 148–49; T. J. Mawson, *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, 2005), 28–52; William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, 2001), 233–37.

<sup>671</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene, 2000), 87–88.

have struggled to see how it could be given that God's will is eternal and unchanging. It is ostensibly logically impossible for God's will to be changed by Atticus' temporal prayer. This is a troublesome problem since it is stronger than the much litigated question of whether prayer works; it holds that prayer cannot work because it seems to involve a changing of God's will.<sup>672</sup> On the other hand, theologians understandably do not want to deny that God takes prayers into account. As the great theologian Louis Berkhof remarked in his *magnum opus*, remarks: "The intercessory prayer of Christ is a prayer than never fails [...] He has merited all that He asks, and therein lies the assurance that those prayers are efficacious."<sup>673</sup> The dichotomy between the two, then, is a double-edged sword for classical theism.

However, Peter Kreeft notes that this is a false dichotomy: it is possible that God's eternal will is in some sense predicated on His creature's prayers.<sup>674</sup> This is a broadly held Thomistic view since Aquinas himself develops this approach in response to Origen's *De Oratione*.<sup>675</sup> Interpreters of Aquinas might object that this makes prayer causally determinative upon God, which Aquinas rejected.<sup>676</sup> However, this view is not causal in a strong compulsive sense; rather, it simply means that God took prayers into account in the exercise of His own volition. As such, God's will is shaped by how we pray, rendering prayer efficacious. Our synthesis accommodates this rather well. Our fictionalist illustration can shed some light here. Imagine that God is, from eternity, past deciding on the plot for His novel of creation. He is, to push the metaphor, choosing the genre, the plot, the sub-plot, and so forth. The fact that God chose a love story for His creation is shaped by His knowing what the characters in that story would

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<sup>672</sup> The idea that prayer would involve a changing of God's will is not raised among professional philosophers as much as one might expect. For example, this problem is not raised in the many problems of petitionary prayer highlighted by H. H. Price in *Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, 1972), 37-55. I think it is a worthwhile area of exploration, though.

<sup>673</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Reprint: London, 1969), 405.

<sup>674</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Practical Theology: Spiritual Direction from St. Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco, 2014), chapter 25.

<sup>675</sup> On a discussion of this, see: Brian Davies, 'Prayer', in: Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (Oxford, 2012), 470-7; cf. *ST* II-II, q. 83, a.2.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*

do. If He knew, via His meta-vision, that the plot would unfold differently and undesirably, He would not have chosen to create that world. As the cosmic author, our choices exist in actuality only because He made us an actuality.

A foreseeable objection here is that if God is the author of the book of creation, as per our synthesis, then He determines which prayers are actual and thus prayer has no effect upon His will. To illustrate, suppose in some possible world W1, David prays for a job as a doctor but in W2, he prays for a job as a barrister. If God chose to actualise W2, then arguably David's prayer is inefficacious – possibly in either world. It is certainly not efficacious in W1 because that world remains mere potentiality; it is not actualised. This is presumably uncontroversial to all but the most radical modal realists. Yet is David's prayer efficacious in W2? Even if we hold that God took into account David's prayer in his decision to actualise W2, the prayer remains incapable of being efficacious since God's decision was still based on His will. One way of thinking about it is this: God wanted David to be a barrister. As such, God created W2. However, God's decision to do so was based on His desire for David to be barrister and He would have actualized W2 regardless of whether David prayed.<sup>677</sup>

This objection, however, seems terribly confused. While one can, and should, agree that prayer in possible worlds is not efficacious, the claims about W2 misunderstand the synthesis. The fact that God chooses which potential plot to make His novel, the crucial point is that within those worlds, there is creaturely freedom. It can scarcely make sense to object that David was given no free will *not to be* a barrister when he freely chose to be a barrister as opposed to another profession in W2. As such, we can dismiss the objection and uphold the claim that the synthesis enriches our theological understanding.

## Prophesy

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<sup>677</sup> I am thankful to a personal friend for this objection.

The great theologian Jürgen Moltmann stressed that prophecies are not promises, and vice-versa. For Moltmann, God does not prophesy; He promises.<sup>678</sup> This is a view that has been defended by John Polkinghorne.<sup>679</sup> At the heart of this distinction is the idea that prophecies have no influence upon the future event itself yet promises are a ‘speech-act’, to use Karl Ludwig Bühler’s term as conceived of by Searle,<sup>680</sup> that are assured by God.<sup>681</sup> While there is great utility in Moltmann’s distinction in that the prophetic role in the Abrahamic traditions was more than predicting the future,<sup>682</sup> our present project will follow the near-universal pre-Humean English definition of prophesy as specifically religious predictions about the future that come true.<sup>683</sup> As Anglican cleric Thomas Chatterton Hammond notes, prophesy is supposed to function as “strong confirmatory evidence” of the providence of God.<sup>684</sup> From this, we can ask the question: ‘How does prophesy work with creaturely freedom?’ In beginning to answer this question, it is helpful to begin with an example of a prophesy. Consider the following passage from the Gospel of John:

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So

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<sup>678</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Creation Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohn (London, 2000), 93–113, especially 93–95.

<sup>679</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: a Christian Encounter with Reality* (Yale, 2004), 54ff.

<sup>680</sup> John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge, 1969), 57ff.

<sup>681</sup> Moltmann, *Experiences*, 93–95.

<sup>682</sup> On this, see: Robert R. Wilson, ‘The Prophet Books’, in: John Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1998), 212–23.

<sup>683</sup> On the pre-Humean definition, see: Richard H. Popkin, ‘Predicting, Prophesying, Divining, and Foretelling from Nostradamus to Hume’, *History of European Ideas* 5:2 (1984), 117.

<sup>684</sup> T. C. Hammond, *‘In Understanding be Men’: An Introductory Handbook on Christian Doctrine* (London, 1963), 65.

when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.”<sup>685</sup>

From the perspective of our synthesis, this passage raises two interesting questions. First, how did Jesus know that He would be betrayed? Second, more interestingly, is whether Judas’ creaturely freedom was compromised by the prophesy. After all, if Judas had not betrayed Jesus, then Jesus would have been wrong – which seems to raise a concern that Judas’ decision was not free. Of this tension, John Drury remarks: this prophesy brings together “the two opposing insights which together grip our minds in the face of tragedy: that fate is irresistible and that nevertheless we are culpable.”<sup>686</sup>

To address the latter question first, our synthesis cuts through the paradoxicality that Drury diagnoses. It is true that Judas’ fate is irresistible but it is irresistible because he exists in the world in which he freely chose to betray Jesus. The world that exists exists (sic.) in part because it is the world in which Judas freely betrays; if Judas would not have betrayed the Christ, then God would have actualised another possible world. As Flint explains, God’s middle knowledge is integral. Judas sins because God knowingly put him in circumstances that He knew that Judas would sin.<sup>687</sup> The Thomistic aspect of our synthesis adds further explanation here too. In the temporal mode, the future is open. The prophesy of Judas’ betrayal, temporally speaking, is indeterminate at the point of time at which it is uttered. It is only in the eternal mode that the truth of the prophesy is affirmed. How can this be? As the synthesis makes clear, the truth value across the two modes of being do not need to correspond.

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<sup>685</sup> John 13:21-27 (ESV)

<sup>686</sup> John Drury, ‘Luke’, in: Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London, 1989), 437.

<sup>687</sup> Flint, *Divine Providence*, 197-212.

One objection to the *scientia media* aspect of this view is offered by the French neo-Thomist Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange. His argument is ostensibly theological since it fixates on the concept of prevenient grace. However, as a philosophical point, it seems to imply that as far as prophesy goes, the use of *scientia media* undermines the goodness of God. He appeals to a ‘principle of predilection’, which he borrows from Aquinas. For simplicity, Garrigou-Lagrange takes the principle to mean that man’s potency to act must come from God. The problem that is being postulated here is that the use of middle knowledge is that it makes a mockery of divine grace or, more broadly, His omnibenevolence. For Garrigou-Lagrange, the Molinist view entails God singling out a particular person’s wills based on their will’s inclination. This is problematic since singling out must come from divine grace, not the human will itself. To illustrate, suppose you have two people: John and Geoff. God puts both John and Geoff in the same circumstance and offers to them both the same prevenient grace. On the middle knowledge view, God sees John accept His grace, singling himself out from Geoff, who rejects that grace. The problem with this, however, is that the singling out then does not come from grace, since equal grace was offered to each. This is troublesome since if they were both given equal grace, then one would not be singled out. Middle knowledge creates scope for creaturely freedom to will themselves into being singled out.<sup>688</sup> Worse, it seems to make human will prior to the divine will.

Can we bridge the Thomist and Molinist view? Absolutely. First, as Mark Wiebe notes, besides the fact that Garrigou-Lagrange cites Aquinas out of context and thus misrepresents him, middle knowledge does not do away with grace since humans are still held to be wholly dependent upon grace.<sup>689</sup> Molina and defenders of middle knowledge have always insisted upon that. Garrigou-Lagrange might retort that that despite the insistence, it cannot be so since

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<sup>688</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis, 1939), 462–63.

<sup>689</sup> Mark B. Wiebe, *On Evil, Providence, and Freedom: A New Reading of Molina* (DeKalb, 2017), 89.

middle knowledge entails creaturely will determines God's foreknowledge. For example, how John would act determines what God knows. Yet this criticism would be confused for two reasons. Firstly, God's foreknowledge is not caused but it needs to be explained. Middle knowledge explains *why* God's foreknowledge has the content that it does.<sup>690</sup> While we may often speak loosely of our actions 'causing' God's knowledge, but all advocates of middle knowledge mean is that God's foreknowledge includes knowledge of such and such because of the counterfactual knowledge that God has prior to the creative decree. John's acting a certain way does not *cause* God's knowledge, especially under my synthesis since John's acting is conceived as a possible plot line in the divine mind, the way John acts *explains* why God has certain beliefs in His body of foreknowledge about John. Secondly, Garrigou-Lagrange appears – respectfully – to be guilty of a double standard here for every view of divine foreknowledge could be accused of being causal in his sense. Whatever view one holds of providence and foreknowledge, all views agree – if they are not Leibnizian – that God chose what sort of world to create. That is to say, God has some sort of creative license when crafting the world. That is uncontroversial. Given that, in every view, God must be considering what happens in each possibility. This is not quite as firm as a middle knowledge view, though similar. As such, God's creative decision – what He chooses to create eventually – is made while He is cognizant of creaturely action. In that sense, God's creative decision is in some sense connected to how His creation and His creatures' actions will unfold. Garrigou-Lagrange might object that the Thomist does not hold this but there is no way a Thomist could hold this without mechanizing God's will and undermining His volition by insisting He could not have created a different world. In light of this, we might say that on the Thomist view, God's will is caused by His creatures since He chose a world based on how well it aligned with His preferences. Yet that is obviously not the case – and Garrigou-Lagrange would, presumably, agree with that. If that is

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<sup>690</sup> Craig, quoted in: Wiebe, *On Evil*, 93



so, then Garrigou-Lagrange attack on middle knowledge is grossly unfair since it is no different from any other view in that it merely explains God's foreknowledge in terms of His making creative choices about what sort of world to bring into being. The strength of the synthesis is seen here too because the synthesis stresses this necessity of looking at *what* to create in Thomistic thought. The use of the survey of possible worlds that God could create from His eternal position provides an explanation for how God can exercise discretion rather than being mechanistically compelled to make a particular world. Moreover, on this view, all the possible worlds are in the divine mind. It would make little sense to say a character compels an author because the author chose to write the book based on what he knew the character would do.

To bring this back to the original point, the use of middle knowledge does not make God's will posterior to the human will, especially under the synthesis I offer. As a result of this, the synthesis' use of middle knowledge to explain why prophecy does not compromise human freedom – thus explaining the simultaneity of irresistibility and culpability – is perfectly legitimate. In fact, the synthesis does doubly well in explaining it because it highlights how prophecy's determinativeness is affected by the Thomistic distinction between modes of being.

To the question of how Jesus knew that He would be betrayed, we should concern ourselves with the broader question of how Jesus' statement could be *true*. As noted, in the temporal mode, future propositions in the temporal mode remain indeterminate. If that is so, the proposition conveyed by Jesus' prophecy was not true, temporally-speaking. Indeed, no prophecy can convey true propositions about the future in that mode. The proposition will one day inevitably become true but at the moment of utterance, it is merely indeterminate. Yet how can it be guaranteed to become true? Because it is eternally true in the eternal mode, as explained in the previous chapter. The reason a prophecy must come true is that its truth is assured by God. Jesus' knows the prophecy will come true because He has access to the eternal mode, as do other prophet by divine revelation (albeit as a glimpse). This view has one major

theological strength: it explains why God's promises are sure in an indeterminate world. In his important work on prophetic spirituality, Paul Hedley Jones develops R.W.L Moberly's emphasis of prophesy as God speaking through humans.<sup>691</sup> If we accept this, it explains why all divine prophesy must be true. All divine prophesy must be true because it derives from God's infallible word. Our synthesis supports this by relating prophesy to the fact God's word must be infallible since He has knowledge of the future. He cannot be mistaken about the future that He so plainly sees. A false prophesy cannot have that guaranteed truth. This is important since the synthesis provides a framework for capturing the exclusivity of true prophethood as something that comes from God, a claim widely held in Abrahamic theism.

Contrast this again with the open theists who really struggle to accommodate prophesy. Millard J. Erickson is brutally candid when he notes that "[i]t should be apparent that prophecy is perhaps the single most element in Scripture for open theism to account for."<sup>692</sup> The reason for this, as Erickson notes, is that the open theist reduces prophesies to highly probabilistic divine guesses. For example, the open theist will argue that the reason Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him is that He knew Judas' character so well that He can make a near-infallible prediction about Judas' future actions. This might seem satisfactory but it does not guarantee truth in the prophesy. It is possible that Jesus was mistaken and the state of affairs described by the prophesy does not obtain – the probability is slim but the possibility remains. By remarkable contrast, the view I have espoused precludes this possibility, thereby allowing theologians to continue to root prophesy in the infallibility of Gods knowledge. As such, in regards to prophesy, the synthesis is superior.

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<sup>691</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, *Prophesy and Discernment* (London, 2006), 1; Paul Hedley Jones, *Sharing God's Passion: Prophetic Spirituality* (Milton Keynes, 2012), 14–17

<sup>692</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?* (Grand Rapids, 2003), 57. Erickson also notes that open-theist Richard Rice concedes this (cf. Richard Rice, 'Biblical Support for a New Perspective', in: Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger (eds.), *The Openness of God: A Biblical to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, 1994), 46.

## Concluding Remarks

“Philosophy [is the] handmaid of theology”, Clement of Alexandria wrote.<sup>693</sup> While this opinion is no doubt unfashionable in the world of contemporary analytic philosophy, it is one that has a commendable history in Catholic scholarship and which has enjoyed a resurgence amongst scholars producing literature on the topic of divine foreknowledge. The intimate link between the two was captured in Matthew Lamb’s edited volume *Theology Needs Philosophy* which demonstrates decisively that the two should interact and support one another.<sup>694</sup> This chapter builds on resurgence by showing how the view of divine foreknowledge I have offered supports, and coheres with, key theological ideas.

Philosophers with little interest in theology will no doubt question why this is necessary. After all, the synthesis can stand on its own as a purely philosophical position about God.

Semantically, one can quibble about it being a sort natural theology but it is firmly within the realm of philosophy of religion. There is no need to talk about prayer, incarnation, and all those other theological matters. This is, of course, absolutely true. Yet the fundamental motivation for most scholars within this debate is to show their conception of God to be coherent. In practice, that does not simply mean philosophical coherence, but coherence with a broad set of theological commitments that they may or want to have. As Karl Barth stressed, philosophical systems provide a framework for understanding religious scriptures and concepts.<sup>695</sup> As such, few theist philosophers will find a position on divine foreknowledge

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<sup>693</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, trans. William Wilson (Edinburgh, 1867), Chapter V (pp. 366-70).

<sup>694</sup> Matthew L. Lamb (ed.), *Theology Needs Philosophy: Acting Against Reason is Contrary to the Nature of God* (Washington, 2016).

<sup>695</sup> Barth’s view, articulated at some length in *Church Dogmatics*, on this matter is carefully explicated at: Thomas E. Provençe, ‘The Sovereign Subject Matter: Hermeneutics in the *Church Dogmatics*’, in: Donald K. McKim (ed.), *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, 1999), 241-62.

compelling if it cannot be shown to align with their theologies.<sup>696</sup> In demonstrating how well the synthesis comports with theological views, we have rendered our position more compelling.

While this chapter has explored only a few areas of theological application, there is potential for further applications, especially across different Abrahamic religions. For instance, one prospective application could be to the doctrine of Qur'anic inerrancy in Islam that reflects the idea that the Qur'an is direct revelation. Likewise, in Judaism, perhaps the synthesis can shed light on Israel's particular covenantal theology. These applications are far beyond our present project but speak to the promising and fruitful ways in which this synthesis can be utilised within each religious tradition. It also offers the opportunity for ecumenical understanding of God's foreknowledge since the synthesis applies to any classical conception of God. Indeed, if David Bentley Hart's assertion that all monotheistic religions - including the more philosophical and theistic manifestations of Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Hinduism - share broadly consistent natural theologies, then the potential for our synthesis is greater still.<sup>697</sup> For present purposes, this chapter has highlighted that for any person who wants to align their theory of foreknowledge with Christian theology or classical theism, the synthesis both supports and is supported its coherence with long-standing religious belief. It has shown that God's providential planning and foreknowledge permeates theology, echoing what that great theologian Jonathan Edwards observed long ago: "The events of providence are not so many distinct, independent works of providence; but they are so many different parts of one work of providence: it all one work, one regular scheme."<sup>698</sup> This chapter has highlighted some of those important areas in which the unity of providence has many different theological parts.

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<sup>696</sup> Most philosophers of religion are Christian theists. On this claim, see: David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, 'What Do Philosophers Believe?', *Philosophical Studies*, 170:3 (2014), 465–500; and Helen de Cruz, 'Religious Disagreement: An Empirical Study among Academic Philosophers', *Episteme* 14:1 (2017), 71–87.

<sup>697</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, 2013), *passim*. As I am not a scholar of comparative of religion, I cannot assess whether Hart's position is correct. It is, however, a worthwhile consideration.

<sup>698</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards in Four Volumes*, Volume I (New York, 1881), 511.



## Conclusion

The great Aquinas scholar Harm Goris concluded his study into Thomistic providence thusly:

Although some of Aquinas' arguments and analyses can and should be improved, revised, or corrected from the viewpoint of contemporary symbolic logic, psychology, cosmology, physics, and other sciences, his overarching philosophical insights and his theological sensitivity and awe of the divine mystery remain valuable to this day.<sup>699</sup>

In this thesis, I have striven to fulfil the task set before us by Goris: to appreciate the value of Aquinas' contribution and to build on it through constructing a synthesis with the work of Luis de Molina and a modern quasi-fictionalist approach. Ernest R. Falardeau echoed this when noted that scholastic theologians, with Aquinas foremost among them, still have much to teach us.<sup>700</sup>

While this thesis represents a substantial and novel contribution to the literature, it is also an invitation for future discourse. It is my hope that it will work to encourage scholars to draw on the immense wealth of knowledge that we have inherited from two millennia of scholarship we have inherited as we pioneer new approaches. In particular, it is an invitation to logicians and modal theorists to work out the counterfactual logic with greater levels of sophisticate and nuance.

With the benefit of the study in mind, we can draw at least 8.

(1) Fatalism is not fatal.

While this thesis was primarily an exploration of providence, it was the fearsome fangs of theological fatalism that motivated and provided the door into this study. Chapter 1

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<sup>699</sup> Goris, *Free Creatures*, 306.

<sup>700</sup> Ernest Falardeau, *A Holy and Living Sacrifice: The Eucharist in Christian Perspective* (Collegeville 1996), 5.

effectively demonstrated that theological fatalism is a variant of logical fatalism and can therefore be dispatched on same basis as the latter: it relies on fallacious reasoning. In any case, it should be clear that both the Thomist and Molinist solutions offer powerful rebuttals to the fatalist charge, though neither are as potent as the synthesis which I have developed.

(2) Thomism and Molinism as separate theories have much to offer.

The perpetual temptation in research is to produce something wholly new. In this project, I have produced a new and cutting-edge approach to divine foreknowledge as a means to resolving the fatalist dilemma that I believe is superior to the approaches already developed within the literature. It is a significant novel contribution to the field. Yet, that has been undertaken with an appreciation that any work produced today stands on the shoulders of over two thousand years of serious scholarship, as seen in the careful and respectful exegesis of Aquinas and Molina in chapters 4 and 5, as well as the discussion of other thinkers who have contributed to this debate in chapter 3. To some extent, it is a neo-scholastic work and a plea for a revival of scholastic philosophical theology. The purpose of this work is not merely to say that Thomism and Molinism have much to offer, but that the failure to engage and learn from those traditions would constitute a huge intellectual loss.

(3) Freedom is to be construed differently for God and man but both can co-exist in freedom.

In chapter 2, different conceptions of freedom were explored. It was held that PAP is the proper understanding of what it means to be free. What this thesis has demonstrated is that we need to approach human and divine free agency as distinct phenomena within PAP, appreciating that we are constrained in ways that God is not, and vice-versa. Above all, what has been made clear is that God's existence does not threaten man's freedom and man's freedom does not threaten God's freedom. This comports well with traditional Abrahamic beliefs about God creating man for relationship: we are free because a free God made us to freely share in Creation with Him. As Karl Barth says in his comments on Genesis 1:27, the text is about "His co-existence as Creator with the creature, He will not be alone as God, but be together with His creature, the God of His creature."<sup>701</sup> We have shown that such communion is, logically and metaphysically, possible.

#### (4) Timelessness holds the key to a proper understanding of Providence

It would not be surprising for someone to question why this thesis dedicated so much space to understanding the dynamic nature of time, God's ability to act timelessly, and so on in chapters 6-8. After all, these are not directly about omniscience. The reason, as this thesis has shown, is that the synthesis – like Thomism and Molinism – relies on the conception apparatus that these discussions establish. If God could not act timelessly, the synthesis would not stand. Likewise, if time were not dynamic, the Boethian distinction between time and eternity that Thomism, Molinism, and the synthesis relies on would collapse. For God to be the greatest conceivable being, to be truly provident,

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<sup>701</sup> Karl Barth, 'The Lord Who is the Servant', in: Ray S. Anderson (ed.), *Selected Readings for a Theology of a Church in Ministry* (Edinburgh, 1979), 164.



He must be timeless. It is His timelessness that makes His omniscience logically consistent with creaturely freedom.

- (5) Middle knowledge is the trick Aquinas missed but that we cannot afford to miss out on.

William Lane Craig famously declared that Molinism is “one of the most fruitful theological ideas ever conceived.”<sup>702</sup> This is difficult to dispute. As we saw in chapter 10, Molinism, specifically middle knowledge, has been under heavy fire since it was rediscovered in the latter half of the twentieth century – yet it survives and thrives. Without the doctrine of *scientia media*, the synthesis we have developed and the benefits of it would not be possible.

- (6) A synthesis of Thomism and Molinism offers a promising route for understanding providence.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that there is hope that a synthesis will help bridge the still unresolved gap between Molinism and Thomism from the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*. In chapters 10 and 11, it was successfully demonstrated that the synthesis involving ‘meta-vision’ offers a much richer, philosophically and theologically, understanding of God’s omniscience and His providence. Aquinas and Molina painted a portrait of a great God but by merging them together, we have painted a portrait of an even greater God – we have moved closer to Anselm’s conception of the greatest conceivable being.

- (7) Thomism and Molinism as a synthesis can help us untangle tricky theological issues.

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<sup>702</sup> As quoted at: Timothy A. Stratton, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis* (Eugene, 2020), 207.

In chapter 11, the synthesis was applied to a wide range of theological issues; it is an unprecedented exploration of how a proper understanding can inform difficult theological questions. The resolutions given may be unorthodox, to an extent, or disputed, but what is undeniable is that the synthesis has a real capacity to open doors for dialogue between philosophers and theologians.

(8) Much of Providence remains a mystery. The words of Albert Einstein come to mind:

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.”<sup>703</sup>

The mystery of providence is perhaps the most profound product of this research. As philosophers and theologians, there can be a great deal of frustration at the presence of mystery. Yet there is great beauty in it. The mystery of providence is no exception. Few scholars of divine providence, one suspects, would stake their career on their particular interpretation of God’s knowledge of the future but we all marvel at the magnificent mystery of God as we contemplate the puzzle. The present hope is that this work will present an opportunity for future researchers to stand in awe as they peek behind the curtain of creation, just as we have.

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<sup>703</sup> As quoted at: George Thomas White Patrick and Frank Miller Chapman, *Introduction to Philosophy* (London, 1935), 44.

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