

The Eternal Act

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Abstract As a personal agent, God's act of creation involves deliberation about His possible courses of action, a decision to act in a certain way, and the execution of that decision. In this paper, I argue that there is good reason to suppose that God's deliberation of the possible worlds cannot make Him temporal. Furthermore, whether we favour a deterministic and indeterministic version of freedom, a model can be constructed of how God timelessly decides to create this world and respond to His creatures. Finally, I argue that the problem of how God executes His decision dissolves, if we adopt a pantheistic viewpoint. This rather unorthodox viewpoint is compatible with other important theistic doctrines.

INTRODUCTION

How should we understand God's relation to our changing world? Is God temporal or eternal? In this paper, I will first present two major reasons for believing that God is temporal. Second, I will present an eternalist position. In this model, God is a person who timelessly deliberates, decides to act, and executes His decision. Third, I will show how God's eternal will is compatible with our freedom. Fourth, I will argue that the best way to understand God's execution of His will is to identify God's will with the creation itself. Then, I will argue that the pantheistic overtones of this position are compatible with many other traditional theistic beliefs. Finally, I argue that the eternalist alternative is superior to the temporalist position.

THE TEMPORALIST POSITION

There are two not entirely separable reasons for believing that God is temporal. The first reason appeals to our conviction that God is a Person. Wolterstorff points out that the God of the Bible is not impassive, but an agent who acts and is acted upon. Wolterstorff claims that the 'temporality of the event that God acts on infects his own action with temporality'.¹ God's 'successive acts are of such a sort that their presence or absence in God's time-strand constitutes change'.²

Swinburne also objects to the view that God is unchanging and eternal.³ Swinburne points out that since God is a person, we can truly say that God brings about events and performs personal acts like forgiving us. However, since the normal sense of our words like 'forgives' or 'brings about' include

¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'God Everlasting', in C. Orlebeke and L. Smedes, eds., *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 197.

² *Ibid.* p. 193.

³ Richard Swinburne, *Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 213–222.

a temporal element, our predications of God could not be true unless He were temporal. Furthermore if God's will were unchanging, then God would always be intending Babylon to fall in 586 B.C. God, as he is pictured in the timeless view, is a very lifeless thing; not a person or agent who reacts to men and who is constantly involved with the affairs of the world.

Following in the same tradition as Wolterstorff and Swinburne, Gale claims that 'only a temporal person can qualify as a person'.⁴ As a person, God interacts with us as a living presence and performs intentional actions to bring about some goal. Gale goes on to claim that 'only a temporally incomplete being can ... will something, since one cannot ... will what one already has'.⁵

This basic view held by Wolterstorff, Swinburne and Gale is representative of a point of view held by many other philosophers who claim that God is temporal. For our purposes, the most important idea behind this view is that if God is a person, He must share the features we typically associate with being a person. He, like us, must be aware of the present moment as a vivid reality and He must have goals. In addition, God must be able to interact with other people and our world. The living God heard David's prayer at one time and answered that prayer at a later time. Depending on one's theory of causation, God is affected by world events (e.g. David's prayer) at the same time or just after those conditions provoked Him. And in response, God acts at that time or at a later time by producing a temporal effect.

There is another prominent reason for believing God is temporal. This consideration is not so much based on God's nature, as it is based on our human nature as free personal beings, and perhaps on the nature of time itself. The basic idea behind this view is that if God were eternal, then His knowledge would be complete and unchanging. But if God already knows what we are going to do, then we cannot be free to act otherwise, since nothing can falsify God's infallible knowledge.

Lucas opts for this point of view.⁶ According to Lucas, we should think of things as having undetermined possibilities. He likens these possibilities to the branches of a tree. At the first moment of our universe, it still has all of its possibilities open to it. As time (or the present moment) passes, and as we make choices, the possible branches which do not become actual drop off, leaving the trunk of the tree (i.e. the unalterable past). Given this view of time, God can know everything about the past and present, but He cannot know everything about the future because the actualization of those facts depends on our free and somewhat unpredictable behaviour. Furthermore, since the future does not even exist until the fact obtains, there is nothing to be known (unless the future is determined by the present facts).

⁴ Richard Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ J. R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality and Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 8–9, 43–54, 65–72, 135–139, 176 ff., 193 ff., 220 ff.

Although I have separated these two considerations to clarify the theoretical issues that are at stake, these two considerations actually go hand in hand since virtually all theists maintain that both God and humans are persons who are, in some sense, free. Alston combines both considerations in an interesting theory of divine-human dialogue.⁷ Alston claims that omnidetermination precludes genuine communication. A ventriloquist, for example, cannot enter into a genuine dialogue with a dummy since the dummy cannot really respond back to the ventriloquist. Although the case is weaker for omniscience, Alston points that a living involvement with another person generally presumes that we do not know for sure how the other person will respond. Ignorance makes mutuality possible. Despite his claim, Alston makes the rather surprising conclusion that a timeless God might still be able to enter into genuine dialogue. In any case, the fact remains: if God is ignorant and gains knowledge, then He must be temporal.

Regardless of one's reasons for believing that God is temporal in the sense required by Wolterstorff *et al.*, as a temporal being, God must change in some way. Typically God's temporality involves a change in knowledge or will. But change of this sort implies a limitation, incompleteness, or imperfection in God. For example, if God changes in knowledge as the world unfolds and time progresses, He must have been ignorant, or worse, mistaken (as Lucas suggests).⁸ This limitation on God's knowledge, which seems to be implied by the temporalist position, is most unsatisfactory.

My objective in this paper is to present a model of an eternal (i.e. timeless) God that preserves the good intuitions found in the temporalist viewpoint, without sharing its defects. Since there is disagreement among philosophers as to whether we have indeterministic freedom or not, models of an eternal God will be constructed for both world views. In this way I hope to show that the notion of an eternal God is not dependent on one's view about freedom. Before considering the distinctive features of the deterministic and indeterministic world views, I will present a general model of God's agency that could be shared by both views.

THE GENERAL MODEL

Since humans are made in the image of God, we can cautiously make some inferences about the nature of God's will and action by considering human decision making⁹ and action. Games provide a good way of illustrating human action. All games have an objective (or criterion of success) and a set of rules or laws that govern the play or action. In the game of chess, for example, the objective is to place the opponent's king in checkmate. To

⁷ William Alston, 'Divine-Human Dialogue and the Nature of God', *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 7–11.

⁸ Lucas, *op. cit.* p. 223.

⁹ Throughout this paper, I use expressions like 'to will x', 'to decree x', and 'to decide to do x' interchangeably.

achieve this goal, the players deliberate about possible moves and counter-moves. A perfectly rational player would know all the possible moves relative to any possible configuration of the board. If the player knew how his opponent would respond on every move, he could use this information to construct a single long range plan that involved a sequence of moves to win the game. On the other hand, if he did not know how his opponent would respond, he could construct an ideal plan that would most likely lead to success, but would also have in mind all possible backup or contingency plans just in case his opponent responded in a way that deviated from the original plan (or the operative backup plan, if the original or a preceding plan could no longer be implemented). Notice that the rational player's ideal and backup plans involve a 'foresight' about the possible moves that remain available after certain other moves have been selected during the course of the game. Regardless of whether the rational player knows how the opponent will respond, after he has decided upon an original plan (and backup plans), he executes, or puts the plan(s) into action. Conceptually, this general model of action includes three basic elements: deliberation about possible moves, a decision to act in certain ways based on that deliberation and the actual response of the other player, and the execution of that decision. All three elements are involved in goal directed action.¹⁰

DELIBERATION ABOUT POSSIBLE ACTIONS

We can use this general model to understand God's action. The first element of action is the deliberation about possible moves or actions and long term strategies to achieve an end. In the game of chess, each possible move depends on the rules of the game (e.g. bishops only move diagonally), the characteristics of the board and the pieces (e.g. pieces with such and such shapes are bishops), and the configuration of all the pieces. Given a configuration, only certain moves are legally possible. The individual possible moves that are permitted by the rules can be expressed in conditional form¹¹ (e.g. if certain conditions are met, then certain actions are possible). An entire sequence of possible moves constructed from individual possible moves constitutes a possible game. The moves in a possible game, of course, are conceptually (and temporally) ordered and can be represented as a series of conditionals (e.g. If Ann moves the knight to space, s, at time, t, Scott will move the queen to If Scott moves the queen to ..., Ann will ...). Clearly God knows all possible chess moves and all possible games of chess. In a similar way, He knows every possible sequence of moves constructed from all

¹⁰ See Carlos Moya for a discussion on plans and intentional action in *The Philosophy of Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), especially ch. 11.

¹¹ Robert Stalnaker points out that conditional beliefs (e.g. Fido's) may be tacit, unrecognized, inarticulate. Clearly, however, the more rational the being, the more explicit are its beliefs. See his *Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p. 104.

the possible basic constituents (including actual basics, like quarks) in all possible combinations. The set that includes all of these possible sequences of possible basic constituents in all possible combinations is the set of possible worlds God could create.

Notice the role of laws and logic in determining what is possible or impossible. On the micro level there appears to be a close connection between the possible basic particles and the possible laws, for if particles are individuated by their behaviour, then, as a matter of logic, particles cannot exist in worlds that have laws that are inconsistent with their defining behaviours. Additional constraints emerge on higher levels of construction. For example, if a world is governed by laws of quantum mechanics, then there will be constraints on the possible sizes of atoms, molecules, mountains, and stars.¹² And if a world has laws that deviate in relatively small ways from our universe, then life,¹³ freedom, and contemplative activity would be impossible.

It is clear that the plurality of possible worlds is at least partly due to possible differences in the laws, for if two possible worlds have different laws, then the worlds themselves must also be different. Are there any distinct possible worlds that have identical laws? Perhaps, but for purposes of this paper, the precise way worlds are actually individuated will not matter. However in order to avoid confusion, I stipulate a distinction between three expressions that will be employed throughout this paper: ‘possible world’, ‘the possibilities of a world’, and ‘a complete possible world’. Let’s say the expression ‘possible world’ refers to worlds which are individuated by their laws such that worlds with the exact same set of laws are the same worlds and worlds with different laws are different worlds. Then, let us say, the individual ‘possibilities of a world’, refers to any possible events that are consistent with a possible world’s laws, supposing we could somehow vary the initial or subsequent conditions of the world. With this kind of variation there could be dramatic change in the sequence of events that follow. I will say that a ‘complete possible world’ (CPW) is a complete sequence of certain possibilities of a world. The complete sequence of events in our universe from beginning to end, constitute one CPW, the actual world.

There are good reasons for thinking that the possibilities themselves are timeless. It is generally conceded that the domains of mathematics and logic are timeless. Therefore, to the extent that possible basic constituents, objects constructed from them, and their possible behaviour is determined by the conceptual, mathematical, or logical constraints of possible laws, to that extent they are also timeless. In any case, it appears that all non-actual possible objects, like John the Baptist’s older brother, cannot really be

¹² Victor Weisskopf, ‘Of Atoms, Mountains, and Stars: a Study in Qualitative Physics’, *Science* **187** (1975), pp. 605–612.

¹³ John Barrow, & Frank Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ch. 1.

temporal. Those possibilities do not change and do not depend on what is actually happening, and as such, cannot be located in time as it really occurs. The timeless character of non-actual possible objects, however, does not imply that these objects cannot have a temporal order relative to other objects in an ideal realm. The concept of John's older brother, for example, includes the fact that John was born after him.¹⁴

It seems clear that the comparative advantages of the CPWs are also timeless. If, for example, a world with life is better than a world without life, then it is always better. Therefore, just as CPWs represented in the Divine Mind do not make God temporal, so too, God's deliberation about their comparative advantages cannot make Him temporal.

There are two reasons why one might doubt my claim that God's deliberation about the CPWs is timeless. First, one could deny that the CPWs are timeless. If the possibilities themselves, for example, were created over time, then God's contemplation of the possibilities would be infected with their temporality.

Hartshorne held this rather radical viewpoint. Hartshorne, at least as Creel interprets him, maintained that there cannot be a maximal or exhaustive set of discrete eternal possible objects derived from the continuum of possibilities, since for any supposed maximal set, there will always be a larger set that contains another member.¹⁵ According to Hartshorne, the possibilities are vague and indeterminate until they become actual. Hence, God's knowledge of what is possible, as well as what is actual, must increase over time.

We can reject Hartshorne's conclusion in one of two ways. First, we can just deny that there are an infinite number of possibilities. For all we know, the intuitionists are right;¹⁶ although the maximal set of objects to be known (including mathematical objects) is HUGE, it is finite nonetheless. In that case, nothing would prevent God from knowing all the possibilities. Second, we could argue that the indeterminacy that results from our human inability to divide a continuum infinitely does not apply to God. Leibniz, of course, maintained that God had *a priori* knowledge of the infinite¹⁷ and Creel has suggested that even if God cannot know the discrete possibilities, He can know the range of possibilities by means of the continua. Whatever the mechanism, if the second way to deny Hartshorne's argument is correct, then God's knowledge cannot increase, even if there are an infinite number of possible objects.

¹⁴ Perhaps numbers provide another example of timeless succession. One (SO) is the successor of zero (o).

¹⁵ Charles Hartshorne, 'Santayana's Doctrine of Essence', in Paul Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of George Santayana* (New York: Tudor, 1951), p. 166; cited in Richard Creel, *Divine Impassibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 38.

¹⁶ Roger Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 112–116.

¹⁷ G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), §416. See also Don Lodzinski, 'Leibnizian Freedom and Superessentialism', *Studia Leibnitiana* 26/2 (1994), pp. 166, 177–180.

The vast majority of Christian philosophers concede that God knows absolutely all of the possibilities. However, there is another reason why someone might maintain that God's deliberation about the CPWs cannot be timeless. An objector might claim that since one CPW, the actual world (which I shall call ' α '), is temporal and is actually changing, it infects God's knowledge with temporality. However, it is clear that the temporal order of our world, α , cannot make God temporal, any more than the temporal order of events in a non-actual CPW can make God temporal. Presumably α would make God temporal only if it changed God somehow (e.g. if God's knowledge were changed by the unfolding of our world). As far as I can see, however, this kind of change can occur only if we adopt a tensed view of time. Later I will argue for the tenseless view of time instead.

For now, the unbeliever can think about the issue as follows. If my critique of Hartshorne's view is correct, God must know absolutely everything about all the CPWs, including α . So even if we accept the objector's claim, this only implies that God does not know which CPW will be actual. It does not imply that God did not know that our world is a possible world. It would be absurd to suppose that God has knowledge of all the CPWs except our own. Therefore, God's knowledge of α , insofar as it is merely possible, cannot make Him temporal.

CONDITIONAL REASONING, THE CONDITIONAL WILL, AND THE END

Given the conditional character of the possibilities, I think we should understand God's beliefs about the possibilities in a conditional or dispositional way.¹⁸ This viewpoint is similar to Alston's functional analysis of God's agency.¹⁹ In general, we can individuate God's beliefs in terms of the job they do, that is, as functions from inputs to outputs (e.g. from possible antecedents to possible consequents). According to this view, beliefs are interactive and part of (timeless) inferential structures. Perhaps the inferential structure can be thought of as a nesting of conditionals, as Leftow suggests.²⁰ Anyway, I think we can apply these same basic concepts to God's desires, and ultimately to His final decision or will. What God wills can be thought of on two different levels: within possible worlds and across possible worlds.

On the first level, God knows how He would respond to every possible situation within that world. I believe its best to think about this situation as being analogous to a chess game. Given a world with certain laws and conditions at any given point in time, God knows what He would do.

¹⁸ See D. J. O'Connor, and Brian Carr, *Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 1982), ch. 2.

¹⁹ William Alston, 'Functionalism and Theological Language', in Thomas Morris, ed., *The Concept of God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 21–40. Reprinted from *American Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1985), pp. 221–230.

²⁰ Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 307–309.

Presumably God acts to achieve some ultimate end through the achievement of a series of intermediate ends (e.g. the fall of Pharaoh or Babylon, or the death of Jesus; cf. Exodus 3:7–21, Acts 2:23). God's achievement of His intermediate ends requires the use of conditional or procedural knowledge.²¹ He rejects intermediate ends and interventions that fail to achieve His ultimate goal (His ultimate standard of evaluation for selecting possible courses of action.) Although God's ultimate goal may remain hidden from us in this life, it is possible God is primarily interested in the final state of a world or the characteristics of the world on the whole. In the former case, perhaps God's goal is to secure some kind of final state such as fixing or maximizing the number of people in heaven, while in the latter case, God's goal might be to create a CPW that, on the whole, is befitting of His nature or is better than all of the other CPWs (e.g. a world with the most variety from the simplest laws).

Since God knows what He would do in any given circumstance, God knows how He would have responded if Babylon repented (cf. Jer. 18:8; Jonah 3:4,10; 1 Sam. 13:13) or if Peter had remained faithful, even though it is a fact that Babylon did not repent and Peter denied Jesus. And, of course, God knows that if Babylon does not repent, then He will cause it to fall in 586 B.C., and if Peter sins and repents, He will forgive and restore Peter.

Creel views God's will entirely in terms of the first level. He indicates that God's will is indexed to the possibilities rather than the actualities. According to Creel, God's eternal resolution is so comprehensive that it includes a divine response to whatever we might actually do.²² Of course, if God's will could be viewed at this level alone, it would be timeless and unchanging. But it is clear that something is missing from Creel's analysis, since God actually (not just hypothetically) wills particular events. What God actually decides to do is conceptually posterior to His knowledge of the possibilities and His conditional will, since God's actual decision includes the information of what He actually decides to do, in addition to the information of what He would do. God's actual will implies that He also knows which antecedents in His conditional will are satisfied. God knows, for example, that Babylon does not repent and that Peter sins and later repents. On the basis of this knowledge and in response to their actions, God actually wills that Babylon fall and that Peter be forgiven and restored. We can think of God's actual decision as the selection of a possible course of action contained in His possible or conditional will, depending on what we actually do.

God's decision about what He will actually do involves an ascent to a higher level of analysis, since it involves a comparison of the CPWs (which include God's possible courses of action as they are expressed within the

²¹ For a discussion of procedural knowledge, see John R. Anderson. *Cognitive Psychology and its Implications*. (San Francisco: W. F. Freeman and Company, 1980), pp. 235–242.

²² Creel, *op. cit.* pp. 21, 206.

possible worlds). Notice that the conditional character of God's will applies not only to decisions within a world, but also to decisions among worlds, for presumably *if* one possible world (or CPW) is better than another, God will will the world that is better, if that is in His control. One's theoretical presuppositions will colour the exact way we understand God's actual will. Those who believe that God is absolutely sovereign think God's comparison of the CPWs results in a decision to actually will a complete PW into being. But at the very least, God actually wills an incomplete world, that is, a universe with certain laws and initial conditions, and He leaves many other details to His creations.

To sum up: three points about the general model need to be emphasized. First, as a personal agent, God deliberates, decides, and executes His decision to achieve some end. The execution of His decision is made on the basis of His deliberation. Second, whether we believe God is temporal or not, God's deliberation about the CPWs He could create is unchanging and timeless. Finally, to the extent God's will is purely conditional, to that extent His will is also timeless.

But can God *actually* will events and interact with His creation, if He is timeless? And can God timelessly execute His decision? Even though the above discussion shows that there is some agreement on the general features of God's agency, we must now consider the deterministic and indeterministic world views, since these different positions shape our exact understanding of God's decision and the execution of that decision.

DETERMINISTIC DECISIONS

As a perfectly rational being, God must consider all of His relevant knowledge in forming His decision to create this universe. So how should we understand God's actual will, if we adopt a deterministic world view? Although there are limits as to how far we can probe the mind of God, some reasonable guesses can be made. Just as some ideas are conceptually prior to others (e.g. the concept of human presupposes the concept of animal), the CPWs that God contemplates can also be ordered in terms of their degree of perfection or goodness. At the most basic level, perhaps, God knows by examining His own nature that principled or lawful action is better than unlawful, arbitrary, or random action (cf. James 4:12). As a result, God rejects the CPWs that are without a law of any kind (if any such possible worlds exist) and narrows His selection to the subset of CPWs that are lawful in some way. From this subset, God selects only CPWs that have the laws that make human life possible,²³ assuming He believes it is better to have a world with humans than a world without them. God is then confronted with the decision as to which inhabited universe He should create. Should He

²³ Barrow & Tipler, *op. cit.* ch. 1.

create a CPW with the Apostle Peter and the event of his denial? Since God knows all of the laws operative in any world, He knows how this rock would behave in our world if I were to drop it from a 10 foot height now, even though I will never drop it. Similarly, if determinism is true, He also knows how each person (e.g. Peter) with nature, N, beliefs, B, and desires, D, would behave in various circumstances C (cf. 1 Sam. 23:12, Matt. 26:31), even if the circumstances never obtain. With this knowledge, God can compare all of the CPWs consistent with the laws of our world and decree to create this particular CPW because it accomplishes His end.

As I have pictured it, God's decision making presupposes He knows the comparative advantages of each CPW He could actualize. This knowledge has a timeless rational order consisting of a series of decisions preceding from general to the more specific considerations and that terminates in a decision to create a CPW that best achieves His end.

A couple of points should be noted about God's decision to create the CPW, α . Since God is omniscient, as we would expect, God's single decision to create this universe is complete, in the sense that every detail of what will happen is specified, including how God will respond as different conditions arise. Leibniz believed that the details of God's decree followed from His decree of more fundamental laws. As he put it in the *Theodicy* (§204)

[W]hen one wills a thing one wills also in a sense everything that is necessarily attached to it ... God cannot will general laws without also willing in a sense all the particular effects that must of necessity be derived from them. But it is always true that these particular events are not willed for their own sake.

If Leibniz's claim is basically correct, every particular event, such as Peter's denial follows from His decree of more fundamental laws (in combination with a specification of initial conditions).

God's decree is not only complete but the particular effects that constitute His will are also interconnected. When God decided to create me, He not only decreed to create certain physical laws and subatomic particles, He also decreed to create my parents, their parents, ... our first ancestors and everything else they were or will be related to. God cannot fully conceive of any particular event, or will that it occur, without also conceiving and willing everything connected to that event.

Since God's will is complete and interlocking, it is impossible that at one time God only wills event, e, and then *at a later time* God wills something *more* (e.g. the future events that follow e or that e cease to exist), if the first part of His will (e.g. that e be actual) is also related to every other event in our universe, including future events. Rather than willing particular events, God, in His wisdom, wills one creative act, an interconnected whole, that includes the entire set of interconnected events: that there be light at t_α , ... , and that Babylon fall at 586 B.C., ... and that there be an end at t_ω .

The content of God's decision to actualize one CPW, by itself, cannot make

Him temporal since it is identical to one of His timeless possibilities that He understands completely. But does the very act of selecting one of the CPWs make God temporal? I don't think so. As was pointed out earlier, God's selection of some course of action is determined by His objective (e.g. to create the world which brings Him the most glory). Therefore, if God knows that course of action, α , would achieve His objective and if He knows that He will choose course of action, α , if (and only if²⁴) it brings the most glory, then it follows with deductive certainty that God will choose the course of action, α . In other words, God's selection of a CPW could easily be understood as a deductive relation between God's knowledge of all the CPWs and of His own character, and the content of His will, α . Since a deductive relation is not temporal, it cannot be a source of temporality.

INDETERMINISTIC DECISIONS

The Deterministic Model of eternal decision making presupposes determinism. However, many reject determinism because of a particular view of freedom. Generally these individuals maintain that we are free only if we are not determined, for if we were determined by other forces or persons, then we could blame them for our failings. However, since our actions depend on our free will, we are fully responsible for our choices and bear the blame or praise.

Earlier we saw that some temporalists believe that indeterminism implies that God cannot infallibly know many things about the future, such as who will be procreated (or how particles at the quantum level will behave?). Consequently, God must make many successive decisions (not one timeless decision) about what He will actually do, depending on how we actually behave. The result is that God's decision making is infected by the temporality of an indeterministic world.

A major problem for this view is that it rejects the traditional conception of omniscience. This limitation on God's knowledge is most unsatisfactory, especially since, as will be seen, we can construct at least one model that shows it is consistent to maintain that the scope of God's knowledge is not restricted by indeterministic freedom or our present temporal location.

There are at least two ways to avoid the conclusion that God is not omniscient. First, we could deny that we have indeterministic freedom. We have just seen that if we have deterministic freedom, nothing prevents God from timelessly knowing our future. Arguments that Leibniz and others have made for the compatibility of determinism and freedom, in my opinion, are quite persuasive.²⁵ In brief, three inter-related criticisms can be made against

²⁴ Leibniz (*op. cit.*) maintained that God would not decide to create a world, unless it was the best. See his *Theodicy*, §§49, 196, 416. For a different view, see Creel, *op. cit.* ch. 11.

²⁵ See, for example, Leibniz, *op. cit.* §§313–320, Richard Brandt, *Ethical Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), ch. 20; J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth:

the theory of indeterministic freedom. First, as Leibniz has pointed out, the claim that the determination of an act comes from ‘a complete indifference absolutely indeterminate’ seems to amount to the claim that the act came from nothing.²⁶ Second, the notion of indeterministic freedom is not really explanatory, since, for example, we must give exactly the same explanation whether an agent in a state of absolute indifference does act, A, or not. According to the theory of indeterministic freedom, it is just a brute fact that the agent did A (or not A). Finally, it is not clear that we can trace the act back to the agent, if there is no determinate causal connection between the agent’s mind and the act. For example, if an agent does A even though he is indifferent or A is inconsistent with his nature, then no reason, beyond an appeal to a brute fact, can explain why an agent did A. In that case, it might be just as appropriate to attribute the act to chance or a totally inexplicable factor rather than to the agent.

Second, we could deny that indeterministic freedom implies that God cannot infallibly know our future. One famous reconciliation between indeterministic freedom and divine knowledge was developed by Molina several centuries ago.²⁷ Molina put forth a doctrine commonly known as ‘middle knowledge’. This knowledge was thought to have a middle status between God’s knowledge of the merely possible and His knowledge of the actual.

Craig is one of the modern day proponents of this position.²⁸ He points out that these three levels of God’s knowledge are structured, not in terms of temporal priority, since the three levels could be ‘simultaneous’, but in terms of their logical (and explanatory) priority.²⁹ It is clear that God’s knowledge of the merely possible (of what could be) is logically prior to His middle knowledge, since God’s middle knowledge is about what we, as indeterministically free beings, would do (not just could do) in every possible circumstance. To put the matter another way, God’s knowledge of the CPWs that indicate what we would do is a proper subset of His knowledge of the CPWs that indicate what we could do. Intuitively we can also see that God’s middle knowledge is logically prior to what is actual, since the actual world is only one member of the set of all the CPWs of what possible persons would do. In addition, God’s middle knowledge is prior in the sense that God needs this information to form His decision to create our world.

If Molina and Craig are correct, there is a possible world where the Apostle

Penguin Books, 1977), ch. 9, and Elliott Sober, *Core Questions in Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1991), pp. 299–318. For one analysis of Leibniz’s deterministic freedom, see Don Lodzinski, *op. cit.* pp. 163–186.

²⁶ Leibniz, *op. cit.* §320.
²⁷ Luis Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. by Alfred Freddosa, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), q. 14, a.13, Disputation 52, n. 9–10; and Disputation 53, pt. 1, n. 5–6; pt. 3, n. 10; pt. 4, n. 3–4 (pp. 168–170, 201–2, 247–8, 254–5).

²⁸ William L. Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1987), ch. 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 127.

Peter does not deny Jesus even though Peter has exactly the same nature (e.g. the same beliefs, desires, or dispositions) and is situated in exactly the same circumstances. Still, it is impossible for God to create such a world, since God knows that Peter would freely sin in those circumstances and God has no control over how Peter freely acts. Now if God knows what we would freely do, we could construct a model of God's timeless decision making along the lines already suggested in the Deterministic Model. But can God really have middle knowledge, if we are indeterministically free? Obviously if we were deterministically free, God could know what we would do, since in the determined worlds persons with certain beliefs, desires, and dispositions (after having engaged in a mental act of deliberation) are determined to act in one way rather than another when placed in the appropriate circumstances. In that case, it would not be possible for Peter to do anything other than A, unless the world were different in some way (e.g. Peter's circumstances were different or Peter had a different nature at that time). But in the case of indeterministically free acts, it would be possible for Peter to refrain from doing A. So can God really have middle knowledge of our free acts?

Plantinga, even though he accepts the theory of middle knowledge, makes a concession that I think paves part of the way for denying that God has middle knowledge. Plantinga concedes that some statements about purely fictional objects have an indeterminate status. For example, the statement that Hamlet wears a size 13 shoe is neither true nor false.³⁰ But if that is correct, then why should we suppose that there is any fact of the matter about what Hamlet would freely do in all possible circumstances?

Adams paves the rest of the way. He rejects middle knowledge on the basis of the nature of actual objects.³¹ Roughly Adams argues that statements about how an (actual) indeterministically free agent, like Peter, would act probably never were and never will be true, since we are free and are not necessitated to act in any particular way. Rather, if Peter were in circumstances, C, Peter might do A and he might not do A.³²

So is there any basis for claiming, as Molina and Craig maintain, that God knows that Peter would in fact deny Jesus? I don't think so. According to the indeterministic hypothesis, it is just as possible (although it may not be as probable) for Peter to acknowledge Jesus as it is to deny him. As a result, there are two CPWs that are identical in all respects up to a certain time. After that time the worlds diverge such that Peter sins in α but not in the other world. Notice that these two CPWs are distinguished *only* by Peter's action and the events that follow that action. Therefore, if one maintains

³⁰ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 157–62.

³¹ Robert Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977), pp. 109–111.

³² See also Stalnaker (*op. cit.* Chap 7, especially pp. 142 ff.) for a discussion on might conditionals.

that God knows what would take place, then, in addition to all that God knows about the world α , He must also know that it is true of α that Peter would (not just could) sin. Clearly α must have an extra property of wouldness that the other CPW lacks. But then that property, in combination with the rest of Peter's nature and circumstances would be properly regarded as a source of determination, thereby destroying indeterministic freedom.

Craig, I believe in an effort to preempt any criticisms of this sort, states that there is a logical order between events, statements about those events, and God's knowledge of those statements. For example, when Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him, the event of Peter denying Jesus was in the future. But even though the event was not chronologically prior to the truth of Jesus' statement, it was logically prior. For a similar reason, future events are logically prior (but chronologically posterior) to God's foreknowledge. In other words, God's beliefs are true on the basis of our future free acts.³³ Craig believes that by this manoeuvre, we can show that our acts depend on us, not on God's antecedent (or as Freddosa puts it, 'prevolitional'³⁴) middle knowledge.

Plantinga has defended the same basic view.³⁵ According to Plantinga, even though God knows what we would do, God is not responsible for our acts. Perhaps if God actualized an impersonal indeterministic process that He knew would lead to some consequence, He would be responsible for the outcome. The case is different for actualizing humans. According to Plantinga, while God actualizes certain states of affairs, like our circumstances, in the strong sense, He actualizes our acts only in the weak sense. In other words, although God may cause our circumstances to be actual, He merely makes our free acts possible. Therefore the contingent truth of what we would do partly depends on us and not entirely on God.

These middle knowledge defences are admirable, but unfortunately adherents cannot have it both ways. Either God's knowledge depends on freely produced acts, or our free acts (*qua* free acts) depend on God's prevolitional middle knowledge. There are at least three reasons for thinking that God's knowledge does not depend on our freely produced acts. First, it seems plausible to suppose that any dependency on God's part is inconsistent with His Perfect Nature. Second, if God's knowledge depends on our future acts, then the aspects of our world that we create must already exist and would not need to be created. God's knowledge cannot depend on something, unless that something exists. Obviously this implication is counter-intuitive. Finally, this picture implies that God is not omnipotent. God cannot do whatever is possible, since His power is limited by the freedom of His creatures. If Peter chooses to sin, God will not be able to have Peter freely refrain from sinning, even though it is possible.

³³ Craig, *op. cit.* p. 128.

³⁴ Alfred Freddosa, 'Introduction' in Molina, *op. cit.* p. 23.

³⁵ Alvin Plantinga, *op. cit.* pp. 170–184. See also Gale *op. cit.* pp. 110–168.

On the other hand, if God's knowledge is prevolitional and He uses this knowledge to make His decision to create this world, then we cannot be indeterministically free, for these propositions entail that we will act in certain ways. Gale has made the same point.³⁶ If God knows that Peter would do A when placed in a certain circumstance and decides to create Peter and place him in those circumstances, then God cancels his freedom since He is a sufficient cause of Peter doing A. Interposing an indeterministic process does not negate the sufficiency of God's will.

The theory of middle knowledge does not succeed in showing how God can be omniscient even though we are responsible for our free acts. Does this mean that God is forced to make His decisions moment by moment, since indeterministic freedom prevents Him from infallibly knowing how we will act?

THE TENSELESS ALTERNATIVE

The conclusion that God is temporal results only if we make an additional unwarranted assumption. We must assume a tensed view of time. Roughly the tensed view of time assumes that the past, present, and future tenses indicate irreducible features of our world that are due to the fact that the absolute present moment is always moving forward to a newly created future.

The tensed view of time should not be accepted uncritically. Horwich employs McTaggart's reasoning to show that this view of time, if not contradictory, is at least problematic.³⁷ Furthermore the alternative view of time, the tenseless view, has support from the scientific community. Minkowski, for example, conceived of a four dimensional world where all events, including the past and future, are determinately present.³⁸ If this view is correct, then our experience deludes us into thinking that only the present moment is real, when in fact all of our acts (past, present, and future) exist within the four dimensional world.

The tenseless view of time requires us to revise our understanding of God's knowledge. I have argued that it is impossible for God to have a logically prior knowledge of what we would do by just contemplating the CPWs, since there are no facts about what we would freely do (in the indeterministic sense). Assuming people can always act in uncharacteristic ways, there is no fact about what a non-actual person, like Hamlet, would do in a fully specified set of circumstances. For the same reason, there is no fact about what Peter would do in the courtyard while he waited for Jesus. There is, however, a fact of the matter about what Peter, as a concrete person, actually

³⁶ Gale, *op. cit.* pp. 152–168. See also Sober, *op. cit.* pp. 296–297.

³⁷ Paul Horwich, *Asymmetries in Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 15–28. See also Michael Dummett's, 'A Defence of McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time', *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960), pp. 497–504.

³⁸ W. L. Reese, 'Minkowski, Hermann' in *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), p. 360. See also Penrose, *op. cit.* pp. 193–201.

decides to do. Although Peter could have avoided sin, as God knows by contemplating the possible worlds, God also knows that Peter actually denies Jesus in the actual world. God's knowledge is based on His contemplation of the actual world itself, which according to the tenseless view, exists in its entirety. But if all events, past, present, and future exist in the presence of God, then His knowledge of what is actual cannot increase, change, or make Him temporal.

TWO ORDERS OF EXPLANATION

The relation between God's knowledge and the objects of His knowledge, such as the actual world, can be viewed according to two possible orders of explanation. According to one order of explanation, God's knowledge depends on us and the temporal facts of the world, and according to the other, the temporal facts depend on (or are identical to) God's knowledge or will.³⁹

Order 1. The temporalist position presented earlier makes the debatable assumption that God's knowledge is like our own. Most, if not all, of human knowledge depends on causal processes that include the object known.⁴⁰ For example, my knowledge of Peter's denial, or what objects are in my immediate environment, depends on the events of Peter denying and the light reflecting off the objects in my environment.

Obviously, if God's knowledge causally depends on certain objects or events (e.g. the events that depend on our choices), then God's knowledge must be infected with the temporality we experience. However if God's knowledge depended on the object in some other way, perhaps logically or counterfactually, then God's knowledge could be timeless. I doubt such a project can work for reasons I already cited when discussing the theory of middle knowledge. However I think it is still instructive to see how we can maintain that God's actual decree is timeless if we adopt the tenseless view of time and Order 1.

For Order 1, we can think of God's decree as having two distinct and logically ordered parts. This distinction very roughly corresponds to Plantinga's distinction between strong and weak actualization. The first part of God's decision involves His actual decision to create our world with certain (probabilistic) laws and initial conditions (the ones that will most likely lead to the end He desires). The second part of God's decision involves the interaction between God's conditional will and our actual behaviour. If

³⁹ Paul Helm makes a similar distinction. He seems to deny that indeterministic freedom is compatible with what I am calling an Order 2 explanation. See *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), ch. 8 and p. 144.

⁴⁰ For the role of causation in our knowledge, see Alvin Goldman, 'A Causal Theory of Knowing', in George Pappas & Marshall Swain, eds., *Essays on Knowledge and Justification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 67–86. Reprinted from *The Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967), pp. 355–372.

Babylon does not repent, God actually decides on the basis of that condition to overthrow the city. Since according to the tenseless view of time, God knows the future just as infallibly as He knows the past and present, He timelessly knows all of His actual decisions. Since God has all of His knowledge at once, His decree also exists as a unified whole. So then, if the tenseless view of time is coherent, indeterminism does not logically imply that God's knowledge increases. And if God's knowledge does not increase, His decision to act in a variety of ways is not temporal.

There is one thing worth emphasizing about Order 1. Although God is fully responsible for His decision to create the initial set up of an indeterministic world and many events that follow the set-up, we are responsible for our own acts. As a result, God's knowledge and decision depend on our actual behaviour, and not on a logically prior knowledge of a possibility of what would happen, if actualized. For those who believe that our freedom involves power that is partly independent of God, the Order 1 picture might provide a legitimate way to understand God's timeless knowledge and decree.

Order 2. The apparent advantage of Order 1 is that it makes us fully responsible for our choices. The second possible order of explanation, that temporal facts depend on (or are identical to) God's knowledge or will, does not face Order 1's problem. It allows for indeterministic freedom and full divine control of the events in the world. How?

Suppose God sees two CPWs that are identical in all respects up to a certain time. Then Peter sins in one world but not in the other world. On the basis of all His information, God decrees that the CPW where Peter sins be actual. Even so, indeterministic freedom is preserved since nothing determines Peter's action in either world. Notice that since this decree involves the selection of a complete indeterministic PW, it stands in contrast to Order 1 where God's decree does not include what we will freely do.

One possible objection to Order 2 that Gale might make is that it gives counterfactual control to God, and therefore seems to cancel our freedom.⁴¹ If the two CPWs are identical up to the time that Peter sins, then the preceding conditions, Peter's nature, and the laws cannot explain why he acted in one way rather than another. But something must explain Peter's action. Ultimately, it seems that God's decision to create this CPW rather than the other is the missing factor that explains why Peter actually sins rather than standing firm. So does God cancel our freedom?

In fact, God does not cancel our freedom in a variety of important senses. First, it is clear that if the words 'free' or 'could have done otherwise' mean 'not determined to do...', then Order 2 preserves our freedom to refrain from doing A in the actual world, since we are not determined by the laws

⁴¹ Gale, *op. cit.* pp. 162–165.

of nature and the preceding circumstances (and if there is no backwards causation). Furthermore, since doing A is not determined, we could have done otherwise. Refraining from doing A is true in another CPW.

There is another important sense in which Order 2 preserves our freedom. We know that a doctor can use electrical stimulation during brain surgery to force a patient to clench his fist even though the patient is asked voluntarily to keep his hand open.⁴² When this happens, the doctor overpowers the patient's will and causes the hand movement by overriding the normal decision making or action producing mechanisms. Now if God's decision to create this world overpowers Peter's desires and will in a similar way, then God's decision explains why Peter acted in a way that was inconsistent with his desires and will. In that case, I think we could truly say that God's decree is freedom cancelling. I know by introspection, however, that God does not cancel our freedom in this way. Despite the fact that God selects a CPW, we still have a mind of our own (and if we did not, I suspect He would not hold us morally responsible).

There is a final sense in which we are free. We still have a power to act. While this power is more evident in Order 1 (since our particular acts do not even fall within the scope of God's will), it is also present in the second order too. God's decision to create α is based on a number of considerations about α and the other CPWs. Perhaps God decides (for whatever inscrutable reason) that if Judas had chosen to remain loyal to Jesus (Jn 17:12), God would not actualize that world. Judas's modal properties influence God's selection of α . In addition, Judas' actual decisions have power to affect God's conditional will, thereby changing the direction of α 's history.

Even though this proposal preserves the important senses of being free, there might be one more objection. As a general matter, the most controversial aspect of both proposals is that they depend on the tenseless view of time. There may be a number of reasons to reject the tenseless view. We certainly do not have any sensory evidence that the future exists (e.g. we can't see or touch it). More importantly, perhaps, it seems that if our future exists, then we have another reason for believing that we cannot really be free.⁴³ If my doing A exists at a future temporal location, then it seems my doing A occurs with fatal necessity. But does this really mean I was not free to act otherwise? Of course, it is a tautology to say that *if* I do A at a future time, then it is false (it could not be) that I do not do A at that time.⁴⁴ But even though it is now an unalterable fact that Peter denied Jesus centuries ago, we can truly say in the 20th century that Peter was free in all the important senses (e.g. he could have done otherwise at that time). For the same reason, it would be just as true to say one second before Peter's denial

⁴² Jose M. R. Delgado, *Physical Control of the Mind: Toward a Psychocivilized Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 114; cited in David G. Myers, *The Human Puzzle: Psychological Research & Christian Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 55.

⁴³ See Lucas, *op. cit.* pp. 30–34.

⁴⁴ Craig, *op. cit.* ch. 6.

that he will be free in those same senses, even if it is an undetermined fact that at the next moment he will actually deny Jesus. The temporal location of an act has no bearing as to whether it is free.

The Indeterministic Model of decision making differs from the Deterministic Model in at least two respects. First, the content of God's will in the Indeterministic Model differs from the Deterministic Model in that an indeterministic world is viewed as a better creation than the deterministic worlds. Second, indeterministic freedom also changes our understanding of the way God forms His decisions. Since God is free, His knowledge of all the CPWs does not determine which world He wills to create. Even so, there is no reason to suppose that God's contemplation of all of the CPWs temporally precedes His decision to create a CPW (or the initial state of the world, if one favors Order 1), since God could use a timeless decision procedure (i.e. a function from all of the CPWs to the (in)complete world decreed).

At the beginning of this paper, we saw that a number of contemporary philosophers have thought that indeterminism implies that God's knowledge increases as the future unfolds. According to my alternative proposals, God never suffers from a lack of knowledge. Without sacrificing indeterministic freedom, He is fully omniscient. As a result, God's decision making is not infected with temporality due to a successive acquisition of knowledge.

THE EXECUTION

Whether God's will determines all of the details of the world or not, His decree is a single interconnected unchanging and timeless decree. Even so, perhaps it is impossible for God to execute it as a single timeless act. Human decisions must be executed in stages. Keith's decision to strike twice, for example, must be completed in successive stages even if we assume that there is no shifting or variation in his will. To execute his decision at t_n , Keith must be at the right place and time and know that the time to strike once has arrived. And at t_{n+m} , he must know that the time to strike again has arrived (i.e. it is now t_{n+m} and not t_n). Are we forced to say that even though God knows which events will be actual and how He will respond to each situation, He also must be located in time to execute His decision to create or actualize a possible world? Does God have to be in time to carry out His creative act of setting-up, developing, and interacting with His temporally ordered world?

One could understand the timeless execution of God's will along the lines suggested by Stump and Kretzmann in their highly influential paper on eternity.⁴⁵ According to Stump and Kretzmann there are four different senses of 'simultaneity'. In its most general sense, 'simultaneity' means

⁴⁵ E. Stump, & N. Kretzmann, 'Eternity', in Morris, *op. cit.* 1987a, pp. 219–254. Reprinted from *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), pp. 429–458.

occurrence at once (i.e. together). The temporal sense means existence or occurrence at one and the same time and refers to a temporal relation temporal events bear to one another. The eternal sense of simultaneity means existence or occurrence at one and the same eternal present and refers to the relation eternal events or entities bear to one another. For our purposes, the most interesting sense of simultaneity refers to the relation between eternity and temporal entities. Stump and Kretzmann call this relation ET-simultaneity (for eternal–temporal simultaneity).⁴⁶ This relation is symmetrical, but is not reflexive (since, for example, an eternal event cannot be its own temporal relatum) and it is not transitive (since even though Nixon’s resignation is ET-simultaneous with eternity and eternity is ET-simultaneous with Nixon’s death, Nixon’s resignation is not ET-simultaneous with his death).

Boethius and Aquinas have likened the relation between eternity and time to the relation a centre point bears to its circumference.⁴⁷ Stump and Kretzmann, however, in order to emphasize the infinite extension or duration of eternity have pictured the ET-simultaneity relation as ‘two infinite parallel horizontal lines, the upper one of which, representing eternity, is, entirely and uniformly, a strip of light (where light represents the present), while the lower one, representing time, is dark everywhere except for a dot of light moving steadily along it’.⁴⁸ Stump and Kretzmann, caution however, that despite the fact that this is the closest analogy of the relation between eternity and time, it is also disanalogous in many respects.

The notion of ET-simultaneity has been used to show how the world is epistemically present to God, but more importantly for us, it has also been used to show how God directly causes events.⁴⁹ Because God is ET-simultaneous (not temporally simultaneous) with the world, God can timelessly interact with the world. Furthermore, it seems that ET-simultaneity implies that God acts directly, since there is no temporal separation between God and His intended effect. Because God bears this relation to the world, He can, for example, fulfil His promise to David by causing Jesus’ entry into the world at just the right time (2 Sam. 7:8–14, Matt 1:1–17, Rom 5:8).

Perhaps the most controversial element in Stump and Kretzmann’s analysis of eternity is their claim that eternity has duration.⁵⁰ I wish to bypass that issue and instead concentrate on the notion of ET-simultaneity and whether that notion gives an adequate way of understanding God’s causal activity

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 227.

⁴⁷ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book iv, prose 6; *De Trinitate*, pp. 364.78–366.82; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk.1, ch. 66; cited in Stump and Kretzmann, *op. cit.* 1987a, p. 233.

⁴⁸ E. Stump, & N. Kretzmann, ‘Atemporal Duration’, *The Journal of Philosophy* **84** (1987b), p. 219.

⁴⁹ Stump & Kretzmann, 1987a, *op. cit.* p. 242. Since then, Stump & Kretzmann have revised the notion of ET-simultaneity by defining it in terms of direct and immediate causal relations. See ‘Eternity, Awareness, and Action’, *Faith and Philosophy* **9** (1992), pp. 477–478. In my opinion, it is more plausible to believe that simultaneity is part of the analysis of causation rather than *visa versa*.

⁵⁰ For example, see Katherin Rogers, ‘Eternity has No Duration’, *Religious Studies* **30** (1994), pp. 1–16.

and the execution of His will. I see two problems with the notions of ET-simultaneity and direct causation.

First, the assumption that God directly causes events by means of ET-simultaneity does not adequately account for the occurrence of individual events. Why? Stump and Kretzmann claim that since everything that exists eternally is all present at once, the whole of eternity is co-occurrent with each time.⁵¹ But if that is correct, then God is wholly present to each particular event (e.g. the births of David and Jesus). This implies that the exact same cause directly produces different effects. But it seems clear that only different causal factors can produce different effects. The whole of God cannot produce different individual effects, although the whole of God can produce one effect, the whole space-time universe.

Second, even if the above problem can be solved, it is not clear that God directly causes temporal events. A photon appears to be a direct cause when it interacts with an electron and puts it into an excited state because there are no intervening processes that connect the photon and the excited state. And there are no intervening processes, presumably because the photon is temporally and spatially contiguous to the electron. But clearly God can't be a direct cause in this sense, for in that case God would be located at a time, and hence temporal. Instead Stump and Kretzmann maintain that God is the direct cause, not because He is contiguous to the effects He produces, but because He is ET-simultaneous with them.

Leftow makes a somewhat different suggestion. According to Leftow, the eternal God is the direct cause of the events He produces because He is omnicontiguous.⁵² However it is not clear how we should understand this attribute. Leftow seems to think that just as there is a (tiny) distance relation connecting temporally contiguous events, so too, there is a distance relation between eternity and time. Unlike temporally contiguous events, however, the distance is zero (just like ET-simultaneity?). But how can this be? If there is no (zero) distance between eternity and time, then it is not the case that there is a distance relation between them.

Despite the apparent differences between Leftow and Stump and Kretzmann, they both use a common strategy to make their case for God's timeless direct causal activity. Their common strategy, however, reveals a common defect. In both cases, they must strip away the (essentially?) temporal element from the notions of simultaneity and contiguity and impart an entirely new sense to these words in order to maintain that God is eternal.

Even if there is content to the notion of a direct cause after we strip away the temporal element, and even if we could explain how the same cause can

⁵¹ Stump & Kretzmann. 1987a, *op. cit.* pp. 232–233.

⁵² Leftow, *op. cit.* pp. 265–267, 223 ff. Sometimes Leftow seems to rely more on the notion of conditionals, rather than direct causation, to explain God's causal powers (pp. 302–309). David Hume maintained in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Book I, Part III, sec. XIV) that causes and effects are contiguous in time and place.

produce different effects, there are several reasons for thinking that God is not the direct cause of events in the world. First, it is plausible to suppose that every divinely produced event is the product of a chain of reasoning. Although this reasoning does not occur over time, it is ordered nonetheless. In this sense, God's action is mediated through His chain of reasons. They are His causes of action. Second, since God is an agent, it seems plausible to suppose His action is more like human action than like a photon's action. Consider Keith's action of striking or kicking a dog. It seems that Keith directly causes the dog's pain. On closer examination, however, we see that Keith made a decision, his brain sent a signal via his nerve to his foot which in turn moved and made contact with the dog. In other words, Keith interacted with the dog by means of his body.

The fact that we do not directly interact with the world, by itself, provides rather weak evidence that God's action is also indirect. This claim, however, is strengthened when we consider the clearest case of divine intervention, miracles. Suppose God literally parted the Red Sea. Since there are laws that explain why seas normally do not separate, we have reason to attribute the event to God and not to a natural process. But even in this case God uses the water to accomplish His miraculous act. The medium cannot be separated from the miracle. And since the water is an intermediary, the parting of the Red Sea is not caused directly. The same holds for any miraculous modification of nature.

PANTHEISTIC TENDENCIES

In order to develop a satisfactory alternative to the positions held by Stump and Kretzmann and Leftow, two other corrections should be mentioned. First, if we adopt Boethius' view that eternity is the complete possession of illimitable life all at once, we must reject the tensed view of time and admit that the future exists. God cannot possess all of His life, if He does not actually possess His acts that occur in our future. Contrary to what many philosophers think,⁵³ the tensed view of time is not compatible with the doctrine of an eternal God. Creel seems to agree, indicating that if the future is actual for God, then the future must exist, since God is a privileged observer.⁵⁴ And if the future really exists, our experience of change must be illusionary. Despite this admission, Creel rejects eternalism, since he maintains that our experience of change cannot be illusionary (since our experience has a privileged status?).

Stump and Kretzmann's theory of eternity needs a second correction. They think that God's life cannot be sequentially ordered from the standpoint of eternity since He does not have a past or future or an earlier or

⁵³ Leftow, *op. cit.* pp. 17–18; see also pp. 21, 62; and Helm, *op. cit.* pp. 116 ff.

⁵⁴ Creel, *op. cit.* p. 95.

later.⁵⁵ It seems more plausible, however, to suppose that the elements in God's eternal will have a sequential order. To the extent that God's will actualizes the temporal world, to that extent God's will mirrors the world and is isomorphically related to it. If this is correct, the sequential structure of the world is represented in God's will (even though God's will as a whole is timeless since it proceeds nothing and it succeeds nothing).

Even if we grant these modifications to our theory of eternity, I'm not aware of any satisfactory account of how eternity relates to time, and more specifically of how God executes His will, if we work within the traditional framework which maintains that God's decree is distinct from its effect, the universe. As an alternative, I suggest that we reject the traditional view, and instead maintain that what God decrees is identical to the universe (i.e. the CPW, α , is identical to the actual world). If this is correct, then God's execution of His will to create this world is identical to His decision to create this world. Although most Christian theists avoid this view since it implies that the universe is part of the Mind of God, it may not be as outlandish as it first seems. St. Paul stated that we live, move, and exist in God (Acts 17:28, see also Jer. 23:24). In addition, Oakes has taken a pantheistic stance. He has defended Berkeleyan intuitions by arguing that we are aspects of the Supreme Mind.⁵⁶

For the rest of the paper, I will assume the Order 2 version of freedom. Those who prefer Order 1 can accept most of what I say, if they make the appropriate modifications. My main point stands however. If God's decree is identical to the universe (or God's decree is identical to part of the world and we complete the rest of the world by means of the Order 1 version of freedom), then God's creative act must be timeless, since God's interlocking decision to create the world is timeless.

While there may be a number of reasons for preferring the pantheistic view over the traditional view, I will focus only on one, one that is based on the nature of the possible worlds. Many think of the possible worlds as independently existing entities or Platonic Forms. We cannot accept that assumption, however, for if the CPWs are contingent, then God is not the sole source of the existence of contingent beings. On the other hand, if the CPWs are necessary, then there would be more than one necessary existent. Furthermore God would not be omnipotent, since He would be constrained by independently existing options that He did not choose and could not change or destroy. It seems clear that the CPWs should be viewed as being nothing more than the possibilities of God (i.e. the ways He could act). To put the matter in other words, the set of CPWs is God's complete dispositional nature.

⁵⁵ Stump & Kretzmann, 1987a, *op. cit.* p. 225.

⁵⁶ Robert Oakes, 'Does Traditional Theism Entail Pantheism?', in Morris, *op. cit.* pp. 57–71. Reprinted from *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983), pp. 105–112.

It's clear that God has knowledge about all possible worlds including the CPW, α . Now either God's knowledge of α is identical to His knowledge of the actual world, or it is not identical (because it differs from α in some respect). If we suppose that God's knowledge of the actual world is not identical to α (even though it may correspond to α), then God doesn't know all of CPWs after all (since the instantiation of the actual world proves that it is a possible world). But since an omniscient God must know all of the CPWs, God's knowledge of α must be identical in every respect to His knowledge of the actual world. And based on the reasoning in the preceding paragraph, this implies that God's knowledge about the actual world is just God's knowledge about part of His own nature. Furthermore, if God's will that the universe, α , be actual is identical to the execution of His will, then God's executed will is timeless because it is identical to His timeless selection of one of His timeless possibilities.

The pantheistic model changes our understanding of our own temporal existence. First, it is clear that we humans are temporal in the sense that we are located *within* the universe and stand in temporal relations to other temporal entities. Nonetheless there are two senses in which we are also eternal. According to the tenseless view of time, even though Aristotle no longer exists (in the twentieth century), he permanently exists at the locations that his life spans (i.e. 384–322 B.C.). The times Aristotle inhabits never changes.

There is another (and more controversial?) sense in which we are eternal. The contingent existence of living and non-living things can be thought of in terms of dispositions and conditionals. The statement that salt has the disposition of being soluble, for example, means that if salt is placed in water, it will dissolve. Humans also have dispositions (e.g. if I hear certain words, I am disposed to think in certain ways). The differentiation of the antecedent that represents the conditional character of various dispositions can be very complex. Even the apparently simple disposition of a body to fall to earth at a certain rate involves a complete set of factors including air density, latitude, altitude, the position of the sun, moon, and stars, etc.⁵⁷ Now if we are nothing more than a highly complex set of dispositions, as our contingency suggests, then we may be timeless in just the same way as other conditional possibilities are timeless. Of course, we are also actual. Just as salt actually dissolves when placed in water, so too, we actually live and breathe when we are in the context of our world's (i.e. α 's) gravity, air, etc. And α , in turn, 'becomes' the actual world when it is in the context of all of God's possibilities and dispositions.

The claim that we have an eternal nature, without denying that God alone is immortal in the supreme sense (1 Tim.6:16), in effect contradicts Stump

⁵⁷ Bertrand Russell makes this claim in order to make a different point in his 'On the Notion of Cause', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 8 (1913), p. 8.

and Kretzmann's contention that there are two fundamentally different modes of existence.⁵⁸ We can properly assimilate time to eternity.

TRADITIONAL TENDENCIES

While many may abhor my suggestion that we should view God in pantheistic terms, the force of this position becomes clearer when we observe that even those who hold to a traditional point of view employ pantheistic concepts. Aquinas advocated doctrines that had a definite pantheistic flavour.⁵⁹ Aquinas maintained that God's essence contains the likeness of created things. As such, God sees things or effects, not in themselves, but in Himself. According to Aquinas, the perfection of the creature wholly preexists in God.

Leftow, following in this same basic tradition, also employs pantheistic language. He has suggested that we can think of God's experience as being like a sense datum that represents two stars,⁶⁰ where one star is forty light years away and the other is eight. These events exist all at once as part of the sense datum, even though the perceiver knows that the events themselves are not simultaneous.

The sense datum analogy certainly suggests we are part of the Mind of God. Leftow's other characterization of eternity, however, commits him to the pantheistic point of view, regardless of his intent. Basically Leftow argues that God acts at the time of eternity and states, 'what occurs at *t* in eternity is *identical* (emphasis added) with what occurs in time'.⁶¹ Eternity, according to Leftow, is a higher dimension where God and temporal things co-exist. In other words, eternity includes the temporal world order. All this language, in my opinion, weakens, if not obliterates, the distinction between eternity and the whole of time.

The abhorrence of the pantheistic view may be misguided since we can retain some important traditional theistic doctrines along with pantheism. First, God is a person. As a Person, God has beliefs which I have characterized in functional or dispositional terms. In addition, God has desires. However, if God desires something, that does not necessarily imply He lacks what He desires. But it does imply that He prefers one state of affairs over another. God's preference structure is evident at different levels. At its broadest level, God's decision is a function from all CPWs to one CPW. At more particular levels, we can see God's desire for His love or justice to be expressed in the temporal worlds. In our world, for example, God's love is a function from certain events (e.g. David's prayer) to other events (e.g. God's answer).

⁵⁸ Stump & Kretzmann, 1987a, *op. cit.* pp. 227, 235.

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.14, a.5–7; in Anton Pegis, ed., *Introduction to Thomas Aquinas* (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), pp. 134–141.

⁶⁰ Leftow, *op. cit.* p. 331

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 230; see also pp. 267, 291.

Second, the pantheistic viewpoint still allows us to maintain the general idea behind the Thomist doctrine that God is Pure Act.⁶² God is not Pure Act, however, in two senses. First, it is not plausible to suppose that God is Pure Act in the sense that He actualizes all His possibilities (i.e. all the CPWs). Second, God's beliefs about the CPWs have a dispositional status, even though God's belief about α is like an occurrent belief (an activated disposition).

God is, however, Pure Act in two other senses. First, unlike humans, God never changes from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality. All that God is, He is at once. Second, even though God does not actualize all of His possibilities, all of His possibilities are active since they all do a job. How? According to my pantheism, God's representations of what is possible are identical to the possibility themselves. In this respect, God's thoughts differ from human representations of what is possible, since the content of our representations of what is possible (e.g. the modal property of the object represented) is distinct from the representation itself. Despite this difference, God's representations are like human representations in this respect. Divine dispositions, like human dispositions, interact to make certain computations. God uses all of His possibilities to compute His decision to create this world. Perhaps the conditional nature of God's dispositions is identical to a timeless linguistic structure in the mind of God (cf. Ps 33:6, Jn 1:1–3).

Third, for all we know, the pantheistic viewpoint might allow us to maintain that God exists necessarily. Even though God has been characterized as being identical to a complete set of dispositions, the complete set of dispositions or conditionals might lead to an unconditional result. Perhaps it is just as contradictory to deny God's existence, given all the conditionals. In that case, we would be forced to conclude that God exists necessarily.

Fourth, we can still maintain that God is the Creator. If I am right, all created things are identical to a set of dispositions. Each set is a proper subset of the total set of dispositions. Unlike God, however, the denial of our existence does not lead to a contradiction. Consequently, we can say that the actuality of every particular thing and event depends on God's total conditional will and dispositions, since these divine attributes are necessary for and result in God's decision to create this world. Perhaps God's selection of α (i.e. His decision to actualize or create α) makes α more determinate than the other CPWs precisely because α has a property the other worlds lack, the property of being selected or preferred over the others. In contrast to the created beings in our universe, God does not depend on anything that is external to His Being for His existence.

⁶² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, lxix; cited in W. T. Jones, *The Medieval Mind*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969), p. 235. See also *Summa Theologica* I q.4 a.1 and Jones, p. 225.

Fifth, we humans retain our individual identity as parts of God. We are not identical to the whole (i.e. God) or to other parts. In addition, we really have some causal influence that affects God and others. As concrete and possible individuals, we have various potentials. The fact that we could, would, or actually realize certain possibilities partly explains why God decided to create this world or intervene in certain ways.

Sixth, even though God does not, strictly speaking, causally interact with the world, He does respond on the basis of His timeless conditional will, a will that is conditioned upon our action. On the individual level, God wills that if Babylon repents of its sin before t_n , God will forgive the city and if it does not, God will overturn the city. God does not will the fall of Babylon under all possible circumstances. Furthermore, since the conditional element of God's will is not located at any particular time (or if it is, it is probably located around 586 B.C.), God does not 'always' will the fall of Babylon (i.e. will it at all times) as Swinburne has alleged.⁶³ On the broadest level, God's total conditional will, consisting of all of His individual conditional considerations (or dispositions), is not responsible for any particular effect, but for the world as a whole.

Seventh, our ability to communicate with God is a special case of our 'interaction' with Him. As far as I can tell, even if God's will and knowledge are complete, we can still enter into a dialogue with God, so long as we have our own identities and our communicative capacities (e.g. to receive and interpret information, to think, and to express ourselves verbally and non-verbally). And, of course, God has these same capacities to the maximum degree (e.g. He knows our thoughts and prayers and can express His Word in our world).

Eighth, the pantheistic view allows us to retain a version of the doctrine of Divine Simplicity.⁶⁴ Since God has different dispositions, we cannot say that God has no parts or aspects. But we can say that God's knowledge of α as the selected world = God's will that α = God's actual power. In addition, if we suppose that God's representations of what is possible are identical to the possibilities themselves, then God's knowledge of all of the CPWs = what God could have done = God's complete power.

CONCLUSION

At the very least, I have shown that the notion of eternal agency is possible. If temporal existence implies that God is ignorant because He must possess His life one moment at a time, then, as Stump and Kretzmann have pointed

⁶³ Swinburne, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1 q.3, a.3,4,7; in Pegis (*op. cit.*), pp. 28–33. See also William Mann, 'Simplicity and Immutability in God', in Morris, *op. cit.* pp. 255–257, 262; reprinted from *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983), pp. 267–276.

out, God's mode of being would be imperfect.⁶⁵ But since God is a Perfect Being, He must be timeless and possess the whole of His life.⁶⁶

In sum, I have shown how it is possible for God to deliberate, decide, and execute an eternal act, whether we have deterministic freedom or not. As an agent, God uses His mind to act and achieve an end. These capacities show that God is personal and free. The eternal God is not a lifeless thing.

Perhaps one surprising conclusion of this paper is that the temporality of God cannot be established on the assumption that we have indeterministic freedom, as many believe. Ultimately it appears that arguments for the temporality of God depend, not on our freedom, but on whether we adopt a tensed or tenseless view of time. Therefore arguments for the temporality of God must show the truthfulness of a tensed theory of time. Even if such a defence were possible, one would then be confronted with the unpleasant consequence that God is not fully omniscient.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Stump & Kretzmann, 1987b, *op. cit.* pp. 214–215.

⁶⁶ For other arguments against the temporality of God, see Leftow, *op. cit.* pp. 273 ff.; and Don Lodzinski, 'Empty Time and the Eternality of God', *Religious Studies* 31 (1995), pp. 187–195.

⁶⁷ I am grateful to an anonymous referee and Peter Byrne for comments on earlier versions of this paper.