

Atemporalism and Dependence

Taylor W. Cyr

Forthcoming in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*; please cite published version.

Abstract It is widely thought that Atemporalism—the view that, because God is “outside” of time, he does not *foreknow* anything (rather, his knowledge is *timeless*)—constitutes a unique solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge. However, as I argue here, in order for Atemporalism to escape certain worries (raised independently by Alvin Plantinga and Linda Zagzebski), the view must appeal to the *dependence* of God’s timeless knowledge on our actions. I then argue that, because it must appeal to such dependence, Atemporalism is crucially similar to the recent *sempiternalist* accounts proposed by Trenton Merricks, Philip Swenson, and Jonathan Westphal, and I conclude by briefly sketching some implications of this result.

1. Introduction

Many of us take ourselves to have, at least on some occasions, a certain kind of freedom—one that involves the ability to refrain from doing what we in fact do. One potential threat to our having this kind of freedom comes from the possibility that an essentially omniscient God exists (who foreknows everything that we will do). This threat can be regimented into an argument for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise, and the classic presentation of such an argument is by Nelson Pike (1965). The argument runs roughly as follows. If God existed a thousand years ago and believed that you would read this sentence now, then apparently you could not have done otherwise than read this sentence now. To do otherwise just then would have required the power to make it the case that, somehow or other, God did not have the belief a thousand years ago that he in fact had (perhaps you might do this by making it the case that God had a different belief—or no pertinent belief at all—at that time, or perhaps by making it the case that God did not exist a thousand years ago). But you have no such power, the argument continues, so you did not have the freedom to do otherwise than read that sentence. And, as there is nothing special about your reading that sentence, this argument generalizes to all human actions.

One proposed solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge can be called *Atemporalism*.¹ On this view, God's *eternity* should be understood as *atemporality* or *timelessness*, rather than as *sempiternity* (which has God in time and existing at all times). To put the point metaphorically, for God to be eternal, according to Atemporalism, is for him to exist "*outside*" of *time*. Atemporalism apparently allows for a distinctive response to the argument sketched above; the argument for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise depends on claims about what an essentially omniscient God *foreknows*, but God does not, according to the Atemporalist, have his knowledge *at times*, and thus he does not know *in advance* what actions human beings will perform. Interestingly, although there has been much debate about the coherence of the claim that God exists "outside" of time, there has been relatively little discussion of Atemporalism as a proposed solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise.² Moreover, the few extant worries that have been raised for Atemporalism, most notably those raised by Alvin Plantinga (1986) and Linda Zagzebski (1991), have not been widely discussed.

The aim of this paper is to pick up this discussion of Atemporalism as a proposed solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge. After a brief presentation of Pike's argument, I will

¹ This view is also sometimes called "the eternity solution," "the Boethian solution," or "Thomism."

² As an anonymous reviewer points out, one such challenge for Atemporalism is to say how it is that God could be omniscient without knowing tensed truths such as truths about what time it is now, or about a past event having already occurred. But provided that Atemporalists can account for knowledge of these tensed truths in virtue of tenseless knowledge, this challenge can be met. For example, take the case of JFK's assassination. God's knowledge of this event is not tensed (he does not know that this already occurred, since God is timeless, on this view), but God does know (timelessly) that JFK is assassinated in 1963 and also that your reading this sentence occurs later than 1963 (and hence that JFK's assassination is past relative to your reading this sentence). For more discussion of this issue, see Alston (1986) and Wierenga (1989).

further explicate Atemporalism, highlighting Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann's (1981; 1991) sophisticated version of the position. I will then go on to show that Plantinga's and Zagzebski's objections to Atemporalism can be met. As will become clear, however, Atemporalism can meet these objections only by appealing to the dependence of God's timeless knowledge on what we actually do. Because of this, I argue, Atemporalism is crucially similar to recent *sempiternalist* responses to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge.³ One upshot of this result is a new conception of the dialectic: *all* proposed solutions to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge must appeal to a certain order of explanation (from free human actions to God's knowledge of them), and there are atemporal as well as sempiternal variations of this common strategy.⁴ Additionally, once I have shown that Atemporalism, like recent sempiternalist responses, relies on an appeal to dependence, I will argue that objections to sempiternalist dependence accounts can be translated into objections to Atemporalism as well, and I will argue that Atemporalism does not possess any argumentative resources that sempiternalist dependence accounts lack.

2. Pike's Argument

³ See Merricks (2009), Swenson (2016), and Westphal (2011). McCall (2011) gives a similar response as does Westphal and Swenson (and Fischer and Tognazzini 2014 treat McCall as another sempiternalist), but McCall is actually an Atemporalist. Fischer and Tognazzini flag this as an "oddity" of McCall's article and note that "this move [putting God outside of time] by itself plausibly undermines the incompatibility argument, since if God's beliefs aren't past with respect to the human action in question, the alleged fixity of the past has no role to play" (2014: 359, n. 18). For reasons that will become clear later, I disagree with Fischer and Tognazzini on this point.

⁴ For a brief argument for a similar conclusion, though it does not explicitly address any particular version of Atemporalism and does not address Plantinga's and Zagzebski's objections, see Hunt (1999: 11-12).

Although there are several versions of the argument for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise, Pike's version has been the most widely discussed version since its publication in 1965. Pike began with certain assumptions about God's essential omniscience, which we can boil down to two key claims: first, God knows (and thus believes) all truths, including truths about the past, present, and future; second, God cannot be mistaken, which Pike took to be captured by the claim that anyone with a false belief (or who fails to be omniscient for some other reason) is not God (1965: 28-29). So far, the Atemporalist can accept Pike's assumptions.

The next of Pike's assumptions, however, is not accepted by the Atemporalist. According to this assumption, God's *eternity* is to be understood as *sempiternity*, which is to say that God exists *at all times* (1965: 29-31). This assumption straightforwardly allows us to say that God knows *in advance* what actions will be performed by human beings in the future. But, according to Atemporalism, God does not exist *at times*, and so does not know about some future human action *at some time in advance of that action*, but rather God exists *atemporally* and *atemporally knows* everything about the past, present, and future. Since God does not, on the Atemporalist's picture, know what will happen *in advance* of its happening, the Atemporalist contends that there is not really any potential problem of divine *foreknowledge*. Thus, according to the Atemporalist, Pike's argument does not establish the incompatibility of God's existence (when construed *atemporally*) and human freedom to do otherwise.⁵

⁵ The reason for including this assumption in the argument for incompatibilism is that it allows the argument to generate worries about freedom from the intuitive idea that the *past* is fixed. As we will see, Zagzebski thinks that it is also intuitive that the *atemporal realm* is fixed, and thus that a very similar argument challenges even the Atemporalist.

Although Atemporalism rejects one of Pike's assumptions and thus will not grant the truth of the argument's first premise, it will be helpful to present the entire argument here and to consider some sempiternalist responses, as we will return to these in later sections.⁶ Imagine that Jones (an ordinary human being) performs some ordinary action X (such as mowing his lawn) at some time T2 (last Saturday, say), which is later than another time T1 (80 years ago, say). Now, here's the argument:

- 1) God believes at T1 that Jones does X at T2.
- 2) Since God's belief mentioned in (1) entails that Jones does X at T2, if it was in Jones's power to refrain from doing X at T2, then one of the following is true:
 - a. Jones was able (at T2) to bring it about that God held a false belief at T1, or
 - b. Jones was able (at T2) to bring it about that God did not hold the belief that he did hold at T1, or
 - c. Jones was able (at T2) to bring it about that God did not exist at T1.
- 3) Alternative (a) in the consequent of (2) is false.
- 4) Alternative (b) in the consequent of (2) is false.
- 5) Alternative (c) in the consequent of (2) is false.
- 6) Therefore, if Jones actually did X at T2, then it was not within Jones's power at T2 to refrain from doing X.

Premise (1) follows from the assumptions mentioned above (and Atemporalism can reject this premise since it rejects one of the assumptions from which it follows). Pike claims that premise (2) is an "analytic truth"—supposing that God's earlier belief entails that Jones does X at T2, the only possible way for Jones to refrain is for the past to have been different in some way, and the

⁶ In what follows, I abbreviate Pike's original version of the argument.

three ways codified in alternatives (a)-(c) appear to be exhaustive. Premise (3) follows from the assumption that God is essentially omniscient. Premises (4) and (5) follow from a widely accepted principle that is sometimes called “The Principle of the Fixity of the Past,” which John Martin Fischer glosses in the following way: “if a person’s performing a certain action would require some actual fact about the past *not* to have been a fact, then the person *cannot* perform the act” (1994: 9). And since there is nothing special about Jones, X, or the times in question, this argument is clearly generalizable to all human actions.

Before we turn to Atemporalism, it will be helpful to consider how some sempiternalist compatibilists have responded to Pike’s argument.⁷ The most popular response in the literature following the publications of Pike’s article is Ockhamism.⁸ Ockhamists begin by distinguishing hard facts about the past (which are temporally non-relational and intuitively “over and done with”) from soft facts about the past (which are temporally relational). The fact that Pike published “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action” in 1965, for example, is a hard fact about that time,

⁷ It is worth noting that, besides the response we are about to consider, there have been two other popular types of response to Pike’s argument. The first is Open Theism, which rejects the assumption that God is omniscient, or at least that he is omniscient in the sense assumed for the argument (according to which God knows all truths about the past, present, and future, including truths about future human actions). Swinburne (1977) and van Inwagen (2008) are proponents of this view. The second type of response maintains that we can be free in the sense required for moral responsibility even if we lack the freedom to do otherwise. On one version of this type of view, moral responsibility is compatible even with *causal determinism*. See the introduction to Fischer (2016) for a defense of this view. Proponents of another version of this type of view—source incompatibilists—deny that moral responsibility is compatible with causal determinism. See Hunt (1999) and Zagzebski (1991) for defenses of this view. Note that each of these responses to Pike’s argument grants the incompatibility of a certain sort of knowledge (exhaustive divine foreknowledge) with a certain sort of freedom (the freedom to do otherwise). In this sense (the one at issue in this paper), then, these positions are incompatibilist ones, whereas Atemporalism is a compatibilist position.

⁸ See Fischer (1989), a collection of essays on Ockhamism.

but the fact that Pike published his paper 51 years before I started writing this paper is a soft fact about the past (about 1965). Ockhamists contend that, while hard facts about the past ought to be held fixed when evaluating what an agent is free to do, (certain) soft facts need not be held fixed.⁹ For example, the soft fact mentioned above should not be held fixed in evaluating whether I was free to do otherwise than start writing this paper. Ockhamists go on to argue that God’s past beliefs about (at least some of) what human beings will do in the future are soft facts about the past that need not be held fixed in evaluating what human beings are free to do, which is to say that premise (4) of Pike’s argument is false.¹⁰ Typically, this argument begins with a defense of some criterion for soft facthood—some version of the “entailment criterion” (according to which soft facts are those that entail that some contingent event will occur in the future, relative to the time that the fact is about)—and then attempts to show that God’s past beliefs satisfy that criterion.

Despite the popularity of Ockhamism in the several decades following the publication of Pike’s article, there have been very few recent defenses of the view.¹¹ In an excellent discussion and critique of the Ockhamist approach, Patrick Todd (2013b) notes a larger trend in recent metaphysics that may explain the decline in support for Ockhamism. After arguing that the God’s unconditional decrees about the future constitute a counterexample to the entailment criterion, Todd says:

⁹ Of course, some soft facts are nonetheless over and done with, such as the fact that Pike published his paper prior to the year 2000. For more on this, as well as a critique of the Ockhamist approach, see Fischer (1983; 1989, introduction; 1994, chapter 6; and 2016, introduction and chapter 7).

¹⁰ I should say that *most* Ockhamists argue for this claim. At least one Ockhamist case has made the case for the fact of God’s very existence (not the fact of his having certain beliefs) being a soft fact about the past, which is to say that premise (5) is false. See Adams (1967).

¹¹ One defense of Ockhamism against some (but not all) of the criticisms that have been raised is Pendergraft and Coates (2014).

I think this example shows that past accounts of the soft/hard fact distinction got off on fundamentally the wrong track. What this example reveals, I believe, is that the notion of entailment is insufficiently discriminating to capture the relevant notion of dependence. From the mere fact that X entails Y, we cannot conclude that X obtains *because of* Y. Philosophers working on the notion of *ontological dependence* have noticed precisely the same thing. Intuitively, some objects exist *in virtue of* the existence of other objects, and thus *depend for their existence* on those objects. For instance, sets depend for their existence on their members and friendships depend on their constituent friends. This notion seems to be of central importance to metaphysics... (2013b: 836)

Because of recent work on ontological dependence, grounding, and metaphysical explanation, many contemporary metaphysicians have been convinced of the limitations of the notion of entailment, and Todd helpfully points out the implications of these limitations for the Ockhamist project. If built on the notion of entailment, the Ockhamist's hard/soft fact distinction will be subject to counterexamples, so the Ockhamist should follow the recent metaphysical trend and appeal to ontological dependence (or the related notions of grounding or metaphysical explanation) to reconstruct the hard/soft fact distinction.¹²

It is unsurprising, then, that many recent compatibilist responses to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge have appealed to the dependence of God's beliefs (about future human actions) on what we do.¹³ Trenton Merricks (2009), to take just one example, argues that God's beliefs

¹² At the end of his article, Todd objects even to this modified version of Ockhamism, but we will not consider that objection here. It is worth noting, however, that Todd's Ockhamist proposal (that he does not endorse) is similar to the sempiternalist compatibilist positions discussed below.

¹³ See the works cited in note 2. Swenson (2016) offers a revised Principle of the Fixity of the Past that does not hold as fixed anything that is explanatorily dependent on what an agent does. To my ear, this sounds like a new characterization of the hard/soft fact distinction, one that avoids the

about the world (including us and our actions) depend on how the world is, was, or will be, not the other way around.¹⁴ But when assessing what you are now free to do, according to this type of view, we should not hold fixed anything that depends on what you do now. And since, on this view, God's beliefs depend on what we do, these should not be held fixed in assessing what we are free to do. In other words, because God's past belief about what you will do depends on what you do, you may be free to do otherwise at the time of your action (and thus have the alternative possibilities required for free will) despite God's past belief that you would act in the particular way that you do.¹⁵ Thus, according to this sempiternalist dependence account, premise (4) of Pike's argument is false, for, given the dependence of God's past beliefs on what we now do, there is a sense in which we are able to bring it about that God held different past beliefs. We will return to this sempiternalist dependence account below.¹⁶

problems that Todd raises for the entailment criterion. And perhaps that is how to think of the other recent compatibilist responses that appeal to dependence. An alternative interpretation would be to think of these views as instances of multiple-pasts compatibilism, according to which we are (at least sometimes) able to act in a way that would require the hard past to be different. If facts about God's past beliefs are taken by these accounts to be hard facts about the past, then these accounts are multiple-pasts compatibilist accounts. It doesn't matter, for my purposes, to which camp these views belong; rather, what is important for my purposes is that each account appeals to the dependence of God's beliefs on what we do (a commitment that could, at least in principle, cut across the Ockhamism/multiple-pasts compatibilism distinction). For more on multiple-pasts compatibilism, see Fischer (1994, chapter 4).

¹⁴ As Merricks notes, this idea can be traced back at least to Origen, who said that "it will not be because God knows that an event will occur that it happens, but, because something is going to take place it is known by God before it happens" (Merricks 2009: 52).

¹⁵ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify. The dependence account really has two key commitments, then: (A) that (some of) God's past beliefs depend on what we do, and (B) that, when assessing what we are now free to do, we should not hold fixed anything that depends on what we do now, including God's past beliefs. Critics of the dependence account may object to either of these components of the account. I will return to this point in the conclusion.

¹⁶ Although these recent compatibilist accounts do not explicitly appeal to the hard/soft fact distinction, these accounts are plausibly interpreted as an extension of the general Ockhamist

3. Atemporalism

Recall that Atemporalism is the view that since God does not know what will happen *in advance* of its happening, there is not really any potential problem of divine *foreknowledge*, and thus arguments (like Pike's) for incompatibilism go wrong by relying on the problematic assumption that God is sempiternal. Now, the Atemporalist can, of course, simply state that God's mode of existence is atemporal and that is that, but if the Atemporalist hopes to show the plausibility of the view, then more should be said to clarify the nature of God's atemporal knowledge and its relation to temporal entities and events.

Perhaps the most thorough attempt to provide such clarification is Stump and Kretzmann's "Eternity" (1981). Following Boethius, they claim that God's mode of existence "is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life" (1981: 430-434). On their understanding of this definition, God not only has life and has it illimitably, but we should understand illimitable life as an infinite duration that is completely possessed all at once, hence their slogan "duration without succession." Unlike temporal beings who have duration by existing from moment to moment, it cannot be the case that God, an atemporal being who *completely* possesses all at once an infinite duration, *existed* or *will exist*; rather, God, since he exists and has life, exists in the atemporal (or eternal) "present"—which is "an infinitely extended, pastless, futureless duration" (1981: 435). And if such a being exists in this atemporal "present," then there is nothing in the definition of this mode of

strategy, since, on these accounts, what *depends on* your present actions—even if it is a past belief—should not be held fixed (as part of the *hard past*) in evaluating what you are now free to do. Indeed, though Merricks himself eschews the hard/soft fact distinction, Fischer and Todd point out (correctly, in my view) that the contentions motivating Merricks, and the sort of dependence needed for his response to succeed, are exactly what is implicit in the Ockhamist strategy that relies on the hard/soft fact distinction. See Fischer and Todd (2011) and Todd and Fischer (2013).

existence that precludes the relation of *simultaneity* from applying to God—at the very least, the atemporal “present” is trivially simultaneous with itself.

Now, in order for God to have knowledge of what happens in the world (including our actions), presumably God would need to be in the simultaneity relation with *temporal* entities and events (like us and our actions). But how, one might ask, could an atemporal being be in the simultaneity relation with temporal entities and events? To answer this question, Stump and Kretzmann develop an account of simultaneity between the eternal present and temporal entities/events that is a natural extension of an adequate account of temporal simultaneity (where both relata are temporal entities/events). After showing that Einstein’s special theory of relativity reveals problems for the intuitive idea that simultaneity is “existence or occurrence at once (i.e., together),” Stump and Kretzmann offer the following definition of (relativized) temporal simultaneity:

(RT) RT-simultaneity = existence or occurrence at the same time within the reference frame of a given observer.

Once we see that there is no privileged reference frame to settle questions about temporal simultaneity, and thus that temporal simultaneity must be relativized, we can now see what it would look like for there to be an analogous simultaneity relation between eternal (i.e., atemporal) and temporal entities/events. Here is Stump and Kretzmann’s account:

(ET) For every x and for every y [where ‘ x ’ and ‘ y ’ range over entities and events], 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*, in 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. (1981: 439)

According to (ET), the ET-simultaneity relation is symmetric but neither reflexive nor transitive. If God, in the atemporal realm, is in the ET-simultaneity relation with you now, then you are now in the ET-simultaneity relation with God in the atemporal realm (and the converse is true, too). But since that relation requires that the two relata have distinct modes of existence (i.e., exactly one of the two must be eternal, and exactly one of the two must be temporal), no temporal or eternal entity/event can be in the ET-simultaneity relation with itself, nor will it follow from *x*'s being ET-simultaneous with *y* and *y*'s being ET-simultaneous with *z* that *x* is ET-simultaneous with *z* (for if *x* is temporal, then so must be *z*, and thus they cannot be ET-simultaneous; the same applies when *x* and *z* are eternal).

4. Two Worries for Atemporalism

With a sophisticated account of atemporality (and the relation between atemporal and temporal entities/events) on the table, we turn now to some worries for Atemporalism as a proposed solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge.¹⁷ The first worry is raised by Plantinga and concerns past truths about God's atemporal knowledge. The second worry is raised by Zagzebski and concerns the notion of "accidental necessity." After discussing each of these

¹⁷ Since we are interested here in Atemporalism as a response to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge, we are setting aside both coherency worries and theological worries for taking God's existence to be atemporal.

worries in this section, I will go on, in the next section, to show that, by appealing to the dependence of God's atemporal knowledge on what we do, the Atemporalist can meet these objections. Along the way, I will briefly mention Stump and Kretzmann's own response to Plantinga's worry, and I will argue that what they say in response is actually insufficient to allay the worry.

After considering Jonathan Edwards's formulation of the problem of freedom and *foreknowledge*, Plantinga argues that a parallel problem for freedom arises from God's *atemporal* knowledge, should that be a coherent possibility:

For suppose in fact Paul will mow his lawn in 1995. Then the proposition *God (eternally) knows that Paul mows in 1995* is now true. That proposition, furthermore, was true eighty years ago; the proposition *God knows (eternally) that Paul mows in 1995* not only *is* true *now*, but *was* true *then*. Since what is past is necessary, it is now necessary that this proposition was true eighty years ago. But it is logically necessary that if this proposition was true eighty years ago, then Paul mows in 1995. Hence his mowing then is necessary in just the way the past is. But, then it neither now is nor in future will be within Paul's power to refrain from mowing. (1986: 239)¹⁸

Like Pike's argument, Plantinga's revised argument relies on the Principle of the Fixity of the Past. But rather than God's past belief being the bit of the past that is allegedly fixed, Plantinga claims that the past truth of propositions about God's atemporal knowledge is now fixed. Thus, he concludes, Atemporalism doesn't save human freedom from the threat of God's omniscience.

¹⁸ Plantinga goes on to show that, even if propositions are not true *at times*, the argument can be suitably modified by replacing talk of propositions being true at times with talk of *sentences* (which express propositions) being true at times.

Like Plantinga, Zagzebski thinks that although Atemporalism avoids the *foreknowledge* problem, it is nevertheless vulnerable to a parallel worry. Rather than appealing to the past truths of certain propositions, however, Zagzebski appeals to the notion of “accidental necessity,” which she notes has been widely discussed since William of Ockham used it centuries ago. For Zagzebski, accidental necessity is the idea that “if some event or state of affairs is in the past, there is nothing anyone can do about it now” (1991: 7).¹⁹ For Zagzebski, then, there is a connection between some event or state of affairs being accidentally necessary and its being fixed, or outside of anyone’s control. For example, if it was accidentally necessary eighty years ago that Paul mows his lawn today, then there is nothing Paul can do about mowing his lawn today—his lawn mowing is fixed (which is to say, he lacks the freedom to do otherwise than mow his lawn today). While it might seem that Atemporalism need not worry about the accidental necessity of God’s knowledge about our actions (since that knowledge is not in the *past*), Zagzebski argues that a parallel problem arises for Atemporalism:²⁰

But what can be more fixed than eternity? Both ontologically and modally the realm of eternity seems to be much more like the realm of the past than of the future. It is ontologically real, like the past and unlike the future, and if *p* is some proposition about a timeless state of affairs, it is not very likely that there exists (timelessly) a potency for *not p*...Ockham connected his doctrine of the necessity of the past with the fact that the past

¹⁹ We should also add that the event/state of affairs must be contingent, and thus not necessary at all times (hence the “accidental” in “accidental necessity”).

²⁰ Others have expressed similar concerns. Adams, for example, says: “But if the necessity of the past stems from its ontological determinateness, it would seem that timeless determinateness is just as problematic as past determinateness” (1989: 1135). Westphal makes a similar claim when he parenthetically remarks: “How does it help to move the knowing that is said to determine our actions from the past to the timeless? It seems to make matters *worse!*” (2011: 247).

has lost potency for being otherwise. So the reason used by Ockham for maintaining the necessity of the past seems to apply equally well to the eternal realm. Furthermore, the intuition that there is nothing I can do now about God's eternal immutable beliefs about my future acts is about as strong as the intuition that there is nothing I can do now about God's past immutable beliefs about my future acts. (1991: 60-61)

Because Zagzebski thinks that it is just as intuitive that the realm of eternity (i.e., the atemporal realm) is fixed as it is that the past is fixed (and thus that both are accidentally necessary), she thinks that God's having atemporal knowledge about our actions should be just as disconcerting as if he were to have foreknowledge of them.²¹

Zagzebski not only objects to Atemporalism generally, however; she also goes on to argue that Stump and Kretzmann's account in particular is vulnerable to an objection from the accidental necessity of the atemporal realm. Suppose I raised my arm at time T2. It follows, on Atemporalism, that God timelessly believes that I raise my arm at T2. According to Stump and Kretzmann, God's timeless belief and T2 are ET-simultaneous. But God's timeless beliefs are ET-simultaneous with all times, including T1, when I was deliberating about whether to raise my arm. It does not follow, of course, that T1 and T2 are simultaneous in any sense, since the ET-simultaneity relation is intransitive. Nevertheless, Zagzebski argues:

²¹ Is it true that the timeless realm is intuitively just as fixed as the past? I am not sure why we should think so, and even Zagzebski admits, before and after the quoted passage, that it is not. Zagzebski says earlier: "the intuition of the necessity of eternity is less well grounded in intuitions about eternity than the necessity of the past is grounded in intuitions about time" (1991: 60). And she also says later: "the Timeless Knowledge Dilemma uses the principle of the Necessity of Eternity, which is no doubt less well entrenched in our intuitions than the analogous Necessity of the Past Principle" (1991: 63).

From *my* temporal perspective before I decide what to do, God's beliefs about what I will do is ET-simultaneous with me. But if it is reasonable to worry that from my temporal perspective the past is beyond my control, it is reasonable to worry that from my temporal perspective what is ET-simultaneous with me in the past is beyond my control...if *A* is ET-simultaneous with *B* and *B* is accidentally necessary, then *A* is accidentally necessary or necessary in a related sense. (1991: 62)

At T2, my deliberation at T1 is in the past, and thus accidentally necessary. But, Zagzebski thinks, if some belief of God's was ET-simultaneous with me back at T1, then that belief must be accidentally necessary now (at T2) just as my deliberation is. So, Zagzebski concludes, God's having timeless knowledge of our actions rather than foreknowledge of them does not save his knowledge from being accidentally necessary now, and thus Atemporalism fails.

5. Atemporalism and Dependence

In my view, Atemporalism can be defended against each of the worries raised in the previous section, but the defense will require positing a certain claim about dependence, namely that God's atemporal knowledge of future (relative to our present) contingent events depends on the occurrence of those events. In this section, I will begin by arguing that Atemporalists have antecedent reasons to invoke this claim about dependence.²² I will then argue that invoking this claim allows for adequate replies to Plantinga's and Zagzebski's worries, and I will explain along the way why a commitment to the dependence claim is also necessary for such adequate replies.

Since the Atemporalist maintains that God's having atemporal knowledge of our actions leaves room for freedom to do otherwise, a natural question for the view is why the atemporality

²² Interestingly, the most recent Atemporalist paper I know of—McCall (2011)—endorses this dependence relation. I will argue in this section that Atemporalists like McCall must do so in order to avoid the worries raised in the previous section.

of his knowledge is relevant to freedom. The natural Atemporalist response is to account for God's atemporal knowledge of some contingent event by appealing to God's awareness, in his "atemporal present," of that event's occurrence. Consider how Stump and Kretzmann articulate this point:

[An atemporal entity] considered as omniscient knows—is aware of—all temporal events, including those which are future with respect to our current temporal viewpoint; but because the times at which those future events will be present are ET-simultaneous with the whole of eternity, an omniscient eternal entity is aware of them as they are present. (1981: 453-454)

Because Atemporalists aim to show that God does not have *foreknowledge*, to make sense of his atemporal knowledge of contingent events that are presently future to us Atemporalists must explain God's atemporal knowledge of these events by appeal to his awareness of them, which is to say that his knowledge of them depends on their occurrence (and his being ET-simultaneous with the times of their occurrence).

And, it is also worth pointing out, Atemporalists should welcome this commitment to the claim that God's atemporal knowledge of certain contingent events depends on their occurrence. After all, it is this dependence relation that is meant to justify the non-fixity of the atemporal present. Stump and Kretzmann explain:

For God, who timelessly sees contingent events future to us when and as they are temporally present, those events have the sort of inevitability that accompanies presentness, and only that sort. For us, relative to whom they are future, those events are as evitable now as the presently occurring contingent events were evitable when they were future. Nothing in God's relationship to those events determines them in advance any more than

our observing [some human agent's] present actions would render those actions of hers unfree. (1991: 418-419)

God's atemporal knowledge of human actions is similar (in this way) to our knowledge of what other human beings are presently doing. Suppose I know that Jones is mowing his lawn because I observe Jones mowing his lawn. Does my knowledge somehow make Jones's mowing inevitable in a way that precluded his freedom to do otherwise? Of course not. Jones is mowing, and I know this because Jones is mowing. Similarly, God's atemporal knowledge of events that are future (relative to our present) depends on the occurrence of those events at those future times—times with which God is ET-simultaneous and thus can observe them from the atemporal realm without rendering those events inevitable.

Not only is it natural for Atemporalism to appeal to dependence, but this appeal is also necessary if Atemporalism is to escape Plantinga's and Zagzebski's worries. Recall that Plantinga is concerned not with God's past beliefs but with the past truth of propositions about God's atemporal knowledge of human actions. If Jones actually mows his lawn at T2, then the proposition *that God atemporally knows that Jones mows his lawn at T2* was true at T1, and, given the Principle of the Fixity of the Past, Jones is not able (at T2) to bring it about that that proposition is false. But if God's atemporal knowledge of Jones's behavior at T2 depends on his observation (from the atemporal realm) of what Jones does at T2, then there is no reason to think that Jones is unable to bring it about that a proposition expressing what God observes at that time is different than it actually is. Just as we do not infer from my actually observing Jones mowing his lawn that his mowing was inevitable (even if it was true earlier that I would observe Jones mowing), neither should we infer from God's actually observing Jones mowing at T2 that Jones's mowing was inevitable (even if it was true earlier that God atemporally observes Jones mowing at T2).

It is worth noting the connection between this reply to Plantinga and Stump and Kretzmann's own remarks in response. (As far as I know, they have not similarly responded to Zagzebski's objections.) They note, first, that Plantinga (an Ockhamist) relies on a distinction between hard and soft facts about the past (which I described above). Facts like the proposition mentioned in the previous paragraph, they continue, must count as soft facts about the past, since they entail the occurrence of some future contingent event. So, they conclude, it would be invalid to infer from the truth of such propositions that the agent lacked freedom. But this reply to Plantinga is insufficient to allay the worry, and for exactly the reason Todd cited in critiquing the Ockhamist project: if built on the notion of entailment, the hard/soft fact distinction will be subject to counterexamples, so we should look instead to the notion of dependence. What counterexample applies in this context? Well, suppose God atemporally *decrees* that Jones mows his lawn at T2; in that case, Jones lacks the freedom to do otherwise that mow at T2 but his mowing then is entailed by God's decree.

The upshot of the failure of the notion of entailment to do the trick is that an adequate reply to Plantinga's argument must appeal to dependence. The general reason is this: if God's atemporal knowledge is *not* dependent on what actually occurs, then we have no reason to think that we have a "handle"—to borrow an expression from Fischer (1994: 129)—on the atemporal realm; that is, we have no reason to think that the atemporal realm is somehow "up to us," under our control, or non-fixed. Without the assumption that God's atemporal knowledge is somehow dependent on our actions (and, it is worth noting, the ET-simultaneity relation does seem to help explain how God's atemporal knowledge could be dependent on our actions), we have no reason *not* to hold fixed God's atemporal knowledge of future contingent events when assessing what we are free to do.

At this point, the extension of this reply to Zagzebski's worries will be straightforward. The first worry (the worry for Atemporalism in general) is that the atemporal realm seems to be more like the past (or at least the bits of it that are fixed) than it is like the future, and thus, she thinks, it is intuitive that the atemporal realm (which includes God's atemporal knowledge of human actions) is accidentally necessary (where a thing's being "accidental necessity" means that there is nothing anybody can do about it now). But once we see that Atemporalism is committed to the dependence of God's atemporal knowledge on what actually occurs, there is no reason to think (and even if we originally found it intuitive, we should no longer find it so) that God's atemporal knowledge is accidentally necessary, for clearly if God's atemporal knowledge depends on what you do now, then there is something that somebody can do about that knowledge.

Zagzebski's second worry applies to Stump and Kretzmann's account in particular, and the worry is that, since God's atemporal knowledge of what I do at T2 was ET-simultaneous with me back at T1 (which is now accidentally necessary, because it is over and done with), it would seem that God's atemporal knowledge (which was ET-simultaneous with what is now accidentally necessary) is now accidentally necessary. But, of course, if God's atemporal knowledge of what I do at T2 depends on what I do then, then there is no reason to think that at T2 God's atemporal knowledge is accidentally necessary, for surely I can do something about God's atemporal knowledge of my actions at T2 if God's knowledge about my actions at that time depends on what I do then. The fact that God's atemporal knowledge is also ET-simultaneous with an earlier time at which I was deliberating about what to do at T2 is just as irrelevant as is the truth of the proposition at the earlier time *that God atemporally knows what I do at T2*.

Must an Atemporalist's reply to Zagzebski appeal to dependence in order to be satisfactory? Well, if God's atemporal knowledge is *not* dependent on what actually occurs, then

Zagzebski is right to worry that the atemporal realm is more like the bit of the past that is over and done with, that no one can now do anything about, that no one has a “handle” on. As I said above, without the assumption that God’s atemporal knowledge is somehow dependent on our actions, we have no reason *not* to hold fixed God’s atemporal knowledge of future contingent events when assessing what we are free to do, which is to say we would have no reason *not* to take God’s atemporal knowledge of future contingent events to be accidentally necessary.

6. Conclusion

Although Atemporalism’s commitment to God’s atemporality is typically taken to provide a unique solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge, I have argued that, in order to avoid certain worries (such as those raised by Plantinga and Zagzebski), Atemporalists must join sempiternalist compatibilists in appealing to the dependence of God’s knowledge of our actions on our actually performing those actions. Given this, compatibilist responses to the problem have a common core—a claim about dependence—and thus are fundamentally the same reply appearing in different packages, one corresponding to the Atemporalist’s conception of God and the other corresponding to a sempiternalist conception. I will now conclude by sketching two significant implications of the main argument of the paper, one concerning the way in which we ought to think about the dialectic and the other concerning Atemporalism’s vulnerability to objections that have been raised for rival *sempiternalist* dependence accounts.

First, given that Atemporalism must meet the objections we have considered by appealing to the dependence of God’s atemporal knowledge on what actually happens, the Atemporalist is committed to very similar claims to the ones made by sempiternalist compatibilists like Merricks. On either account, God’s knowledge is had because of (i.e., it depends on) what actually happens in the temporal realm, and it is because of the direction of this dependence relation that we need

not (compatibilists argue) hold fixed God's knowledge of certain contingent events when evaluating what human beings are free to do. The common core of the compatibilist reply, then, is an appeal to a direction of dependence, not to God's mode of existence, and thus it is best to think about the difference between Atemporalism and sempiternalist alternatives as fundamentally the same reply to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge that happens to come in two different packages, one corresponding to the Atemporalist's conception of God and the other corresponding to a sempiternalist conception.²³

A second implication of Atemporalism's commitment to the dependence of God's atemporal knowledge on what we do is that objections to sempiternalist dependence accounts will be translatable into objections to Atemporalism.²⁴ To see why, consider the two central claims made by the sempiternalist dependence account. As we saw above (at the end of section 2), the account says both (A) that (some of) God's past beliefs depend on what we do and (B) that, when

²³ As I noted earlier, other replies to Pike's argument (such as Open Theism) do not merit consideration as *compatibilist* replies, since they deny the compatibility of exhaustive divine knowledge of future contingents and human freedom to do otherwise. There is one other type of reply to Pike-style arguments that I have not considered, and it denies that God's having knowledge entails that he has beliefs. (See Alston 1986 for the classic defense of this view.) Still, even on this sort of account, God's knowledge must depend on what actually occurs, so it is best, I think, to conceive of this sort of account as a third way to work out the fundamental reply to the argument, which is an appeal to dependence.

²⁴ For some recent objections, see Todd (2013a) and Fischer and Tognazzini (2014). An additional potential objection for Atemporalists with a broadly Thomistic picture of God (a picture that includes the doctrine of simplicity) who also wished to adopt Atemporalism (and surely Stump, at least, is such a person) is the tension between 1) Aquinas's claim that God's knowledge is the cause of all things, including human actions, given that his will is joined to his knowledge, and 2) the dependence of God's knowledge on what actually occurs. The reason for the tension is that the direction of causation (from God's knowledge/will to the human action) is opposite the direction of dependence (from the human action to God's knowledge), and it is counterintuitive, at best, to think of an effect as grounding its cause.

assessing what we are now free to do, we should not hold fixed anything that depends on what we do now, including God's past beliefs. As it turns out, there are two main types of objection to the sempiternalist dependence account, each corresponding to one of the account's two central claims. According to one type of objection, it is implausible that the past (including God's past beliefs) depends on the future in the way that (A) requires, so (A) is false.²⁵ According to the other type of objection, even if some parts of the past depend on what we do in the future (relative to those past times), even the dependent past is fixed, so we should hold fixed even the dependent past when assessing what we are now free to do, which is to say that (B) is false.²⁶

But notice that each of the two central claims made by the sempiternalist dependence account, i.e., (A) and (B), must be accepted, *mutatis mutandis*, by Atemporalism. If Atemporalism is to appeal to dependence (as I have argued that it must), it will have to say both (A*) that (some of) God's atemporal beliefs depend on what we do and (B*) that, when assessing what we are now free to do, we should not hold fixed anything that depends on what we do now, including God's atemporal beliefs. Because Atemporalism must accept these parallel claims about dependence, objections to sempiternalist dependence accounts translate into objections to Atemporalism. According to the first type of objection, it is implausible that the atemporal realm (the realm of eternity, including God's atemporal beliefs) depends on the future in the way that (A*) requires, so (A*) is false. According to the other type of objection, even if some parts of the atemporal realm depend on what we do in time, even the dependent parts of the atemporal realm are fixed, so we should hold fixed even these parts of the atemporal realm when assessing what we are now free to do, which is to say that (B*) is false.

²⁵ Todd's (2013a) objection is (arguably) of this type.

²⁶ Fischer and Tognazzini's (2014) objection is of this type.

A residual question worth addressing is whether Atemporalism has any argumentative resources not enjoyed by sempiternalist rivals and thus retains some dialectical advantage. (It is also worth asking whether Atemporalism brings any unique *disadvantages* to the dependence account.) Once any reasons for thinking that Atemporalism enjoys an advantage over rival sempiternalist dependence accounts have been considered, we will be in a better position to judge whether Atemporalism offers any assistance to the compatibilist's project.

Acknowledgements

For comments on earlier versions of this paper, I am grateful to John Fischer, Simon Kittle, Andrew Law, Jonah Nagashima, Michael Nelson, and Jared Smith. Thanks also to an anonymous reviewer for this journal.

References

- Adams, Marilyn McCord. 1967. "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?" *The Philosophical Review* 76: 492-503. Reprinted in Fischer 1989, pp. 74–85.
- Alston, William. 1986. "Does God Have Beliefs?" *Religious Studies* 22: 287-306.
- Fischer, John Martin. 1983. "Freedom and Foreknowledge." *The Philosophical Review* 92: 67-79.
- Fischer, John Martin, ed. 1989. *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Fischer, John Martin. 1994. *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fischer, John Martin. 2016. *Our Fate: Essays on God and Free Will*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fischer, John Martin, and Todd, Patrick. 2011. "The Truth about Freedom: A Reply to Merricks." *The Philosophical Review* 120: 97–115.
- Fischer, John Martin, and Tognazzini, Neal. 2014. "Omniscience, Freedom, and Dependence." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 88: 346-367.
- Hunt, David. 1999. "On Augustine's Way Out." *Faith and Philosophy* 16: 3-26.
- McCall, Storrs. 2011. "The Supervenience of Truth: Freewill and Omniscience." *Analysis* 71: 501–506.
- Merricks, Trenton. 2009. "Truth and Freedom." *The Philosophical Review* 118: 29–57.
- Merricks, Trenton. 2011. "Foreknowledge and Freedom." *The Philosophical Review* 120: 567–586.
- Pendergraft, Garret, and Coates, Justin. 2014. "No (New) Troubles with Ockhamism." In J. Kvanvig (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (Vol. 5). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 185-208.
- Pike, Nelson. 1965. "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action." *The Philosophical Review* 86: 209–216. Reprinted in Fischer 1989, pp. 57-73.

- Plantinga, Alvin. 1986. "On Ockham's Way Out." *Faith and Philosophy* 3: 235–69. Reprinted in Fischer 1989, pp. 178–215.
- Stump, Eleonore, and Kretzmann, Norman. 1981. "Eternity." *The Journal of Philosophy* 78: 429–458.
- Stump, Eleonore, and Kretzmann, Norman. 1991. "Prophecy, Past Truth, and Eternity." In J. Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives* 5: 395–424.
- Swenson, Philip. 2016. "Ability, Foreknowledge, and Explanatory Dependence." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94: 658–671.
- Swinburne, Richard. 1977. *The Coherence of Theism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Todd, Patrick. 2013a. "Prepunishment and Explanatory Dependence: A New Argument for Incompatibilism about Foreknowledge and Freedom." *The Philosophical Review* 122: 619–639.
- Todd, Patrick. 2013b. "Soft Facts and Ontological Dependence." *Philosophical Studies* 164: 829–844.
- Todd, Patrick, and Fischer, John Martin. 2013. "The Truth about Foreknowledge." *Faith and Philosophy* 30: 286–301.
- van Inwagen, Peter. 2008. "What Does an Omniscient Being Know about the Future?" In J. Kvanvig (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (Vol. 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 216–230.
- Westphal, Jonathan. 2011. "The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Freewill." *Analysis* 71: 246–252.
- Wierenga, Edward. 1989. *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. 1991. *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.