

# A Note on Eternity

Ciro De Florio & Aldo Frigerio

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## A Note on Eternity

Ciro De Florio<sup>1</sup> · Aldo Frigerio<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** The timeless solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom has many advantages. Still, the relationship between a timeless God and temporal beings is problematic in a number of ways. In this paper, we focus on the specific problems the timeless view has to deal with when certain assumptions on the metaphysics of time are taken on board. It is shown that on static conception of time God's omniscience is easily accounted for, but human freedom is threatened, while a dynamic conception has no problems with human freedom, but, on this view, some truths seem not to be knowable by a timeless God. We propose Fragmentalism as a metaphysics of time in which the divine timeless knowledge of temporal events and human freedom can be reconciled.

**Keywords** Divine omniscience · Eternalism · Fragmentalism · Temporal logic

### 1 Introduction

Eternity is definitely a very difficult topic. With reference to (Sellars 1962, p. 527), William Craig writes:

An eminent philosopher has remarked that “the problem of time” is virtually unrivaled in “the extent to which it inexorably brings into play all the major concerns of philosophy”. Combine the problem of

time with “the problem of God,” as the study of divine eternity requires, and you have a subject matter which would exhaust a lifetime of study. (Craig 2001, p. iii)

Even confining ourselves only to recent contributes within the very conspicuous literature on this matter, we can identify at least three large families of problems. First of all, there is the problem of distinguishing the ways in which God and other timeless entities, such as abstract objects, eternally exist. In which sense is God out of time? Is He out of time in the same manner in which the number 4 is considered out of time? Note that the questions discussed in philosophy of mathematics since Benacerraf (see Benacerraf 1973) share interesting analogies with the topic of the interaction of a timeless God with temporal and spatial entities. One of the classical problems Benacerraf dealt with is how it is possible to characterize mathematical knowledge—i.e. knowledge of abstract properties and relations—in a naturalistic framework. Mathematical objects are abstract, timeless, non-spatial entities and, therefore, they are causally ineffective. Then, it is not clear how human beings, that are part of the temporal and spatial net, can acquire knowledge on the domain in question. Similarly, on the timeless account of God's existence, it is not clear how He can causally interact with spatial and temporal entities. In fact, the problem of the cross-relations between God and temporal entities is even more pressing: while it is possible to paraphrase mathematical language in order to show that its ontological commitment is actually less demanding for a naturalist account of knowledge, the same argumentative move is not available to an advocate of the timeless view of God.

Another question, which has been discussed for a long time, concerns the nature of eternity itself. In particular,

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✉ **Ciro De Florio**  
ciro.deflorio@unicatt.it

**Aldo Frigerio**  
aldo.frigerio@unicatt.it

<sup>1</sup> Department of Philosophy, Catholic University of Milan, L.go Gemelli, 1, 20123 Milan, Italy

one can inquire how a timeless entity can have a life, that is, how it can be in states that have a duration. A possible strategy is to claim that God's life has a simple extension, devoid of parts. Another way to answer is by calling into question the assumption that a personal being cannot have a punctual life, without any duration.

A third family of problems specifically regards the relationship between a timeless God and the entities that exist in time. This paper will look into some of these problems. In particular, God's timeless conception will be compared with some metaphysical accounts of time. The paper is divided into five sections: in the next section, the timeless solution to the problem of divine omniscience and human freedom is reviewed. In Sect. 3 the relationship between God's timeless conception and a static metaphysics of time is analyzed. In Sect. 4 we provide some attempts to reconcile a genuinely dynamic conception of time with an atemporal view of God. Finally, Sect. 5 contains our proposal.

## 2 Timeless Solution to the Dilemma of God's Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

The problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom can be summed up as follows: God is omniscient and, therefore, He knows today what John will do on 3rd March 2026. In particular, assume that God knows that on 3rd March 2026 John decides to mow his lawn. Is John free to decide to mow his lawn or not? If John decided not to mow his lawn, then God's present belief would be false and, thus, He would not be omniscient. But, if John cannot do but to mow his lawn, he cannot be considered free. God's omniscience seems to be a limit to human beings' freedom.

A possible solution to this problem is to state that God's knowledge is not in time. It is inappropriate to say that God knows something today because God is a timeless entity. He atemporally "sees" John's free act exactly as John's birth, his death, and every event that makes the world history. On this view, John can choose to mow his lawn or not because his choice has no influence on God's past beliefs, which do not properly exist.

Some critics of this solution (cf., for instance, Zagzebski 1991) have objected that a fatalist argument can be mounted also in this case. The idea, in a nutshell, is that if God timelessly knows that John decides to mow his lawn—let us call  $p$  the proposition describing this state of affairs—the truth of  $p$  is fixed *ab aeterno*. It is, therefore, not in John's power to choose not to mow his lawn, making  $\neg p$  true. A possible response to this objection (cf. for example Rogers 2007) is to underline that God knows that John mows his lawn *because* John freely chooses to mow his lawn. Therefore, necessity of  $p$  does not undermine the

agent's freedom. It is the agent herself who, by choosing  $p$ , makes  $p$  necessary. Now, since God is eternal, He is co-present with every time and knows every time as if it were present; therefore, God knows every action performed by the agent at every time. Nevertheless, this knowledge does not clash with the agent's freedom because it depends on the agent's choice. If we see an agent  $a$  performing an action  $p$ , then we know that  $a$  performs  $p$  and that  $p$  has a consequent necessity. Yet, this is not in contrast with  $a$ 's freedom. The same is true for God: He eternally sees every point in time and thus He sees  $a$  performing  $p$  at  $t$ . So  $p$  has a consequent necessity at  $t$ , but neither God's knowledge nor the consequent necessity of  $p$  are in contrast with John's freedom.

The timeless solution appears to be an interesting proposal to solve the dilemma of divine omniscience and human freedom. In fact, one of the main reasons to adopt a timeless conception of God is because it reconciles omniscience with freedom. However, we will see that this solution has to face the problem of the metaphysical relationship between an eternal entity and temporal entities and, in particular, the relationship between God's timeless knowledge and the temporal entities that are known. Under assumptions, these relationships seem to undermine human freedom.

## 3 God's Knowledge and the Static View of Time

The metaphysics of time one is assuming is crucial when inquiring the relationship between an eternal entity—like God—and the temporal states of affairs.<sup>1</sup> We will distinguish below, rather roughly, two very general options regarding the metaphysics of time: the *static* (or eternalist) conception and the *dynamic* conception.<sup>2</sup>

The eternalist conception seems to be particularly consonant with the idea of an omniscient and timeless God. However, the advocates of this conception have to deal

<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the assumed metaphysics of time is not relevant when the *intrinsic* nature of a timeless God has to be characterized. By definition, an entity that is outside time is compatible with presentism, eternalism and the conceptions that are intermediate between these two (growing block theory, moving spotlight, etc.). It is, of course, necessary to formulate the different metaphysics of time in such a way that they do not exclude that something outside time can exist. For instance, if the main thesis of presentism is: only present entities exist (cf., for example, Crisp 2003), this axiom should be reformulated as: all that exists in time exists in the present.

<sup>2</sup> We prefer not to use the A-theory–B-theory terminology here because it could be difficult to ascribe some positions to these classes. Consider, for instance, the moving spotlight theory. According to this view, all temporal things exist eternally. However, the present has a privileged ontological status and determines the objective time flow. This position has some features of both the A-theory (the present is ontologically privileged and time flows objectively) and the B-theory (future and past facts exist eternally).

with one main issue: the *fatalist threat*. Let us see this point in detail.

In our discussion we will presuppose a rather shared principle, the Truthmaker Principle:

- (TM) Every truth requires a truthmaker, an existing state of affairs (or ‘fact’) that necessitates and thereby grounds its truth.<sup>3</sup>

God is conceived as out of time and, thus, His knowledge cannot change and evolve in any way. Now, since God is omniscient, He knows every truth. For (TM), if God knows  $p$ , then there exists a truthmaker that makes  $p$  true. The matter becomes particularly intriguing when we assume that God (atemporally) knows the future course of history.<sup>4</sup>

Let us assume that God eternally knows that John mows his lawn on 3rd March 2026. Since knowledge is factive, it is true that John mows his lawn on 3rd March 2026. This proposition is true, therefore a truthmaker that makes the proposition true must exist. Under some assumptions, the truthmaker cannot be a present state of affairs, because at the present nothing determines John’s future free choice. John’s future free choice must, in a certain sense, already exist. The thesis that all facts—past, present, future ones—exist is usually called “block universe theory”. The whole history of the world is already given and the only temporal relations are the relations “earlier than”, “simultaneous with”, etc. that characterize the B-series. God’s omniscience and eternity seem to imply a static view of time.

However, it is not clear whether such a view allows for a libertarian conception of freedom.<sup>5</sup> If every choice is already given, it is not indeterminate today whether John will perform  $p$  or not in the future. If nothing is indeterminate, no room seems to be left for libertarian freedom.

<sup>3</sup> For this formulation, (Rhoda 2009, p. 41). On this topic, we refer, among others, to Armstrong (2004), Beebe and Dodd (2005), Lowe and Rami (2009).

<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, on the ground of the definition of knowledge and from that of truthmaking, one could consistently claim that, since today it is neither true nor false that John will make  $p$  tomorrow, there is no actual truthmaking that makes the proposition true (or its contradictory true). Accordingly, one should affirm that even God does not know the outcome of John’s decision today, because this is indeterminate at the present. God will learn tomorrow what John will decide tomorrow because He will see his decision. However, this conception requires a temporal God, who changes His beliefs on the basis of what happens in time.

<sup>5</sup> On this point, W.L. Craig notices an interpretative problem in Thomas Aquinas’ position. Although it is reasonable to believe that Thomas considered becoming an objective feature of reality and embraced a dynamic view of time, his doctrine on future contingents is intelligible only if a tenseless theory of time is assumed: “[...] The entire temporal series would seem to exist timelessly, on the analogy of a spatial extension, and as such is known by God” (Craig 1988, p. 117).

A first solution is to accept a compatibilist view of freedom. On this view, the problem of divine prescience and human freedom rapidly dissolves. However, here we would like to investigate the solutions that hold a stronger conception of freedom, that is the libertarian conception.

## 4 God’s Knowledge and the Dynamic View of Time

Only few advocates of the eternalist conception of God are ready to pay the price of a block universe because such a view of time seems to undermine a strong conception of freedom. Consider the two following thesis:

1. God exists in a timeless manner and He has a particular relationship with the temporal entities.
2. Time flows and the becoming of temporal entities is a real dimension of being.

In this section we will discuss two significant proposals that hold these two points: Stump and Kretzmann’s and Leftow’s positions. We will see, however, that, their merits notwithstanding, they suffer some problems.

### 4.1 Simultaneity and Eternity

Stump and Kretzmann believe that time and eternity are separate ontological dimensions. The eternal events cannot be temporal and, conversely, the temporal events cannot be eternal. Since there are two categories of events (temporal and eternal), there must be two simultaneity relations, one for the temporal events and the other for the eternal events:

- (T) T-simultaneity = existence or occurrence at one and the same time
- (E) E-simultaneity = existence or occurrence at one and the same eternal present (Stump and Kretzmann 1981, p. 435)

In order to characterize the relationship between the eternal God and the temporal world, Stump e Kretzmann postulate a third type of simultaneity, called ET-simultaneity:

- (ET) For every  $x$  and for every  $y$ ,  $x$  and  $y$  are ET-simultaneous iff
  - (1) either  $x$  is eternal and  $y$  is temporal, or vice versa; and
  - (2) 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

- (3) 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. (Stump and Kretzmann 1981, p. 439)

The relation of ET-simultaneity is symmetric (if  $x$  is ET-simultaneous with  $y$ , then  $y$  is ET-simultaneous with  $x$ ), but also irreflexive and intransitive. If it were transitive, absurd conclusions would follow: since time  $t$  is ET-simultaneous with God and God is ET-simultaneous with another time  $t'$ , it would follow that  $t$  and  $t'$  are ET-simultaneous.

A possible problem concerns the temporal/eternal existence of events. Stump and Kretzmann mention the following example. Suppose that in His eternal present God is simultaneous—ET-simultaneous—with Richard Nixon when he was alive on 9th August 1974. However, God is also simultaneous with Richard Nixon at the moment of his death on 22th April 1994.<sup>6</sup> From the point of view of God's eternal present, Nixon is both alive and dead, which is absurd. Stump and Kretzmann respond that:

One and the same eternal present is ET-simultaneous with Nixon's being alive and is also ET-simultaneous with Nixon's dying; so Nixon's life is ET-simultaneous with and hence present to an eternal entity, and Nixon's death is ET-simultaneous with and hence present to an eternal entity, although Nixon's life and Nixon's death are themselves neither eternal nor simultaneous (Stump and Kretzmann 1981, p. 443)

Stump and Kretzmann's view has received numerous criticisms. It has been claimed that their position is obscure (Fitzgerald 1985; Helm 2011) or that it introduces a concept (that of ET-simultaneity) that is entirely *ad hoc* and that does not offer any explanation of the metaphysical relationship between eternity and time (Yates 1990; Helm 2011). However, we do not believe these criticisms to be appropriate: the ET-simultaneity relation is neither obscure nor unjustified. The basic idea is that there are two dimensions—the temporal and eternal dimensions—and three different kinds of relationships that characterize the relations among temporal things, those among eternal things and those between temporal and eternal things. In fact, no account claiming that God is outside time can dispense with these three kinds of relationships.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Richard Nixon died in 1994, after the publication of Stump and Kretzmann's paper. We have changed the example in light of this.

<sup>7</sup> Stump and Kretzmann's theory is a more formal version of a classical way of representing the relationships between temporality and eternity, which goes back at least to Boethius: that of a circle with a point in the center. The circle represents the temporal series while the central point is God's eternal perspective, which has the same

What seems a more serious difficulty for Stump and Kretzmann's position is that the relation of ET-simultaneous is completely unanalyzed. In fact, such relation is substantiated in a different way according to the accepted metaphysics of time. For example, consider the static block-universe. Then, ET-simultaneous is a relation between static and non-dynamical things and can be conceived as stable and a-temporal. Instead, let us assume a non-dynamic metaphysics of time according to which the present time is privileged compared to the other times. Since there is a variable privileged time (the present), how can God have the same ET-simultaneous relation with every time? The present is distinct from the other times and this fact represents an important feature of temporal reality. How can God have the same identical relationship with the present time and with the other times? Only two alternatives seem to be open: either we affirm that God does not know an ontological trait of the world—for instance, the fact that it is 4 o'clock now—or we affirm that the dynamicity of time is an illusion. However, both these alternatives are unpalatable. So, the question is whether it is possible to reconcile the temporal dynamic with the fact that God has the same relationship with every time. Since Stump and Kretzmann do not analyze the ET-simultaneous relation in any way, these problems remain unsolved.

## 4.2 Leftow's Position

Brian Leftow puts forward an alternative solution. His basic intuition is that the events are, in a way, both temporal and eternal. Consequently, God, who lives in the eternity, sees events under the eternal respect while they are temporally present to us. Leftow characterizes the eternal dimension by means of an analogy according to which space is to time as time is to eternity. The analogy is rather articulated (Leftow 2009, pp. 212–213) but we will just focus on a few points: as all the spatial points co-exist in a unique instant of time, so all the temporal points co-exist (and, in a sense, are contained) in the eternity. Particularly, just as entities with spatial features remain so when they exist in time, so entities with temporal features remain so when they exist in eternity. Reality is, according to Leftow, structured in an eternal dimension which includes God and the temporal things that exist *at once*. Therefore, God and the world are

Footnote 7 continued

relation with every point of the circle. In this representation there are two kinds of points: those on the circle and that in the center. They represent the two dimensions: temporality and eternity. The relations TS and ES are represented by the relations between the things that are on circle and those that are in the center respectively. The existence of the radii of the circle justifies the third kind of relationship—the ETS relation.

simultaneous in the eternity but nevertheless the world does not lose its genuine temporal properties.

In order to explain how an event can be both temporally located and eternally present, Leftow assumes a particular interpretation of Special Relativity according to which the concept of simultaneity is relative to a framework. It is both scientific and philosophical folklore that one of the consequences of the Special Relativity Theory is the relativization of the concept of simultaneity between events to different inertial systems. Leftow's philosophical intuition proposes to extend the relativity of simultaneity to the concept of *actuality* of the events:

If simultaneity and presentness are relative to reference frames, then if present events are actual in some way in which future events are not, this sort of actuality is itself relative to reference frames. Thus, there is a (strictly limited) sense in which the relativity of simultaneity entails a relativity of actuality. (Leftow 2009, p. 232)

We shall not discuss here the plausibility of this particular interpretation of the Theory of Special Relativity even if—obviously—a good deal of philosophical work should be done in order to show the very possibility of extending to *actuality* what it holds for the *simultaneity*. Robinson sums up:

[A]lthough all events of all times are present at once in eternity, it does not follow that all events of all times are present at once *in time* or in any temporal reference frame. Although in eternity time is tenseless, it does not follow that *in time* time is tenseless. (Robinson 1995, p. 133)

Unlike Stump and Kretzmann's account, which state just one ontological dimension for the mundane events—that is, the temporal one—Leftow provides a sort of ontological reduplication: things exist in time *and* in eternity.

A first problem of such a view concerns human freedom. If it is eternally true that Obama drinks a beer on 24th May 2032, is Obama really free of doing otherwise on that day? We shall not seriously take into account this problem, but we believe that Rogers gave an adequate answer to it, by carefully distinguish between eternity and necessity (Rogers 2007). The fact that it is eternally true that Obama drinks a beer on 24th May 2032 does not mean that this fact is necessary. Obama could act differently, and in that case, it would be not eternally true that Obama has his beer at that time, but instead the negation of that proposition would be true. Moreover, it is necessary to distinguish between “eternal” and “since always”. From the notion of eternity does not follow that the events are fixed “from the beginning”, with the consequence that it would be already true from the beginning of time that Obama drinks a beer

on 24th May 2032. In the a-temporal dimension, that event is so and so just because Obama chooses in that way in the temporal dimension.<sup>8</sup>

Another problem of Leftow's proposal seems to be more complicated. Leftow advocates a dynamic conception of time. This means that there is a privileged instant (the present), that this privileged instant changes and that this fact is a genuine ontological feature of reality. This is true for those who accept presentism and for those who accept a version of the moving spotlight theory: in both cases the temporal reality is characterized by a privileged instant with respect to the others. However, in God's eternal framework all the times are on a par and there is no privileged instant. By definition, there is no dynamicity. There seems to be a feature of reality that is not grasped by God. Notice that it is not possible to say that the dynamic status of temporal reality is just an illusion and that only the eternal dimension obtains. This would be in contrast with Leftow's proposal: it would lead us to a static conception of temporality. The privileged instant, on the contrary, is not an illusion and, therefore, the dynamicity is something that essentially characterizes the temporal reality.

Often this problem is emphatically set by stating that a timeless God cannot know what time it is. If one accepts the idea that the dynamicity of time is an illusion, in other terms, if one accepts a block universe, this is not a problem. But if one is ready to say that the universe is dynamic, then the fact that it is 4 o' clock and not 5 o' clock, or that *now* Obama is drinking his beer, is an actual feature of the reality which a timeless God cannot access since for Him all times are on a par. And if there is something real which God does not know that could represent a problem for His omniscience. At first glance, in Leftow's framework, there is no way to escape this problem.

Let us briefly sum up what has been stated so far. Two problems emerge within the tenseless conception of divine knowledge. Firstly, if it is eternally true that an agent does *p* at time *t*, it seems that the agent cannot do otherwise and, then, this position would imply the theological fatalism. Secondly, assuming a dynamic conception of time, there is an instant, the present, which is privileged. But from the eternal point of view of God, no time is privileged, therefore it seems that God does not grasp an aspect of reality. Stump and Kretzmann's solution from one hand and Leftow's, from the other, do not provide an adequate solution to the second problem. We believe, however, that by assuming a fragmentalist conception of time a solution can be found. The next section will discuss this topic.

<sup>8</sup> This solution has a price: it admits a grounding relation between the free choices of a temporal entity (Obama) and an eternal state of affairs (divine knowledge). This relation has to be a-temporal even if it seems to be alike to a causal relation which can hardly be considered out of time.

## 5 Divine Knowledge and Fragmentalism

In the previous paragraphs we have seen that it is not easy to characterize a timeless account of divine knowledge; here, we will provide a tentative answer by referring—at least partially—to Kit Fine's account in philosophy of time known as *Fragmentalism* (Fine 2005; see also Lipman 2015).<sup>9</sup> We will proceed as follows: we will state four general theses concerning our version of Fragmentalism and then we will offer a timeless account of divine knowledge.

(T1) Temporal reality is fragmented

It is important not to equivocate, here: (T1) does not mean that there is something, i.e. the temporal reality, whose parts are fragments of it. On the contrary, this is exactly the thesis Fragmentalism denies: reality is originally fragmented. What exists in a proper sense, in any instant, is a fragment. And—as we will see below—it is not possible to coherently refer to something as “all fragments”.

(T2) Every fragment is constituted by tensed facts:  
past, present and future facts

So, time is “real” since there exist genuine A-properties. In every fragment, there exists a set of present facts, the “now” of the fragment. In the next fragment, part of the future facts of the previous fragment are present facts, present facts are past and so on.

(T3) Fragments are incompatible

This would be not surprising. Let us assume that now Obama is standing. In another fragment, Obama is sitting; so, the two fragments are not compatible. (Lipman 2015) developed a logical framework in which one can handle two types of consistency which he calls, respectively, coherence and coherence\*. The idea, in a nutshell, is the following: he provides a semantic to a dyadic connective ‘•’ whose intended meaning is “is compatible with”. This allows us to say that whilst it is not logically contradictory that Obama is sitting and Obama is standing, since there can be two fragments in which these states of affairs obtain, the two facts are incompatible since there is no fragment in which both states of affairs obtain.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> We are not interested in a faithful construal of Fine's position; rather, we will exploit some intuitions of fragmentalism which we think illuminating to solve the problem of divine timeless knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> Lipman's system has weird consequences: for instance, from  $A \bullet B$  does not follow A.

(T4) Fragments are not internally complete

This is the most relevant difference with respect to Fine's system. To guarantee freedom in the libertarian sense, we assume that the facts of a fragment are not a maximal set; there are undetermined regions, i.e. those dependent on the agent's free decisions.

Our metaphysical framework is then—very roughly—described by (T1–T4). How does God eternally know? The idea is that God simultaneously sees each fragment. Let  $K(g,p)$  be the eternal fact that God knows the proposition  $p$ . And this holds for all true propositions, given God's omniscience.  $p$  is true in virtue of a truthmaker, that is, a fact which makes it true. So, God eternally knows that Obama drinks a beer in 2032 because Obama freely chooses to have a beer. Today Obama has not chosen yet and the proposition relative to this fragment is neither true nor false: it is about a region of the future which is ontologically undetermined. But if Obama decides to have such beer, then this fact is actual—in a certain fragment—and the proposition is true relative to that fragment.

There exists no ontologically dimension *beyond* the temporal one, as it happens in Leftow's proposal. Obama does not have a modality of eternal existence, in addition to the temporal existence. Obama just exists in time and the existence in time is fragmented. We said that a fundamental problem for the eternalist accounts is to preserve the timelessness of divine knowledge together with free acts. These two facts seem to contradict each other: if God eternally knows a free act  $F$ ,  $F$  has to be, in a way, determinate and then  $F$  cannot be really free. Fragmentalism answers to this dilemma by stating that  $F$ —as any mundane reality—is never determinate or indeterminate *simpliciter* but always with respect to a fragment. Therefore,  $F$  is not determinate in a given fragment but it is in another. And the reason of its determinateness is the agent's free action. That decision exists as a present fact *and* as a past fact. But it is not necessary, since its nature is decided by the agent.

On the proposed view, even if God is conceived as eternal and even if the reality is dynamic, God has a full access to the temporal reality and there is no feature of reality He cannot know. For *every* fragment has a privileged instant, the “now”, and God knows which instant is privileged in any fragment. Obviously, from an eternal point of view, there are many “nows”, all incompatible; but this is not a problem for the fragmentalist since this is her basic intuition: temporal reality is fragmented. Contrary to the more traditional dynamic conceptions of reality, in this framework any fragment has its now; therefore, there is no aspect of reality that God cannot know.

There are (at least) three possible objections to our account:



1. A first objection is that Fragmentalism is not a real dynamic conception of time. There is no real passage from one fragment to another but there is just a fragmented temporal reality which is intrinsically static. So, the success of Fragmentalism is illusory; it solves the problems the dynamic conceptions deal with just because it is not a dynamic conception but an eternalism in disguise.

One can answer to that by noting that the Fragmentalism's conception of time is quite far from the block universe view of eternalism. The tensed properties of facts are different within the various fragments and through these properties it is possible to reconstruct a sort of passage of time. For instance, in fragment  $f_1$  a fact  $s$  can hold the tensed property of being future, in fragment  $f_2$  the property of being present and in fragment  $f_3$  that of being past. It is therefore possible to reconstruct the passage of time according to which  $s$  is future, then present, then past by means of the tensed properties of the fragments  $f_1$ ,  $f_2$  and  $f_3$ .

2. There is no—since there cannot be—a coherent description of God's contents of knowledge. Let us elaborate. The indeterminist conception we assumed entails the following: let  $f_1$  and  $f_2$  be two fragments; let us describe the fact that Obama drinks a beer  $A$ , and the fact that Obama does not drink a beer  $\neg A$ . Let us employ **P**, **N**, **F** as tensed attributes meaning respectively past, present and future. Given the indeterminism we have that in  $f_1$ ,  $\mathbf{N}(\neg\mathbf{F}(A))$  and  $\mathbf{N}(\neg\mathbf{F}(\neg A))$ , namely, today it is not a fact that in the future Obama will drink a beer and it is not a fact that in the future Obama will not drink a beer. Things obviously change in  $f_2$ . Obama (freely) chooses to drink a beer and then we have  $\mathbf{N}(A)$ . But if it is currently true that  $\mathbf{N}(A)$ , then it must be a past fact in  $f_2$  that Obama would drink a beer, that is  $\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{F}(A))$ . Therefore God knows that  $\neg\mathbf{F}(A)$ , that  $\neg\mathbf{F}(\neg A)$  and that  $A$ . The ground of His knowledge in the first two cases is the fact that Obama has not chosen yet, while in the third case, that Obama has chosen. Since God's knowledge is always actual (eternity as extended present) God sees things as present, which are, in turn, present, past, and future. On this account, God sees both the indeterminateness of  $A$  and its actuality. He sees them in two different fragments.

However, according to Fragmentalism, the various fragments are incompatible; so, the fact that  $A$  is indeterminate in the fragment  $f_1$  and actual in the fragment  $f_2$  is not troublesome. In a certain sense, even our knowledge is structured in this way: we know that yesterday it was indeterminate that Obama would drink a beer today, but we know that it is not indeterminate today that Obama is drinking now a beer and then that

today is determinate that it was true yesterday that Obama would drink a beer today.

3. One could maintain that throughout the fragments there exists a true future: there is a set of facts which, at the end of the day, will be actual despite the indeterminateness within a single fragment. Sure, it is indeterminate whether today Obama will drink his beer but Obama is going to choose something and his choice is actual in a certain fragment. So, as in the Ockhamist accounts, there exists "today" the sequence of true future propositions: the Thin Red Line (*TRL*), quoting Belnap's expression (Belnap et al. 2001).

Here, there is an objective tension: on one hand, Fragmentalism is not committed to the existence of *TRL* since all that exists there exists in the fragments and, by definition, the *TRL* is a section of the fragments; but on the other hand, we should concede that God knows the *TRL* and then it exists—in a sense. Our aim is not to characterize the reality *sub specie aeternitatis*; rather, we would like to provide an account of timeless divine knowledge which is compatible with free agents and a genuine dynamism of time. Moreover, we think, that the existence—in a sense—of a real future and God's knowledge of this future is a minimal condition not to misinterpret the intuitive concept of omniscience which grounds the classical theism. According to this definition, a non-omniscient God could not be provident, with all the consequences.

## 6 Conclusions

In this work, we have discussed the timeless account of divine knowledge. Traditionally, there are good reasons to believe that God does not exist in time and that, consequently, His modality of knowledge is timeless. That is, God does not foreknow the future but He sees any instant as if it were present. Among the reasons to advocate this view, it is particularly relevant the fact that it gives a coherent account of the divine omniscience and human freedom. However, some questions can be triggered by the eternalist solution. First of all, it is reasonable to presuppose a God who does not exist in time only if the time is real. If we adopt a static metaphysics of time, like, for instance, the block-universe view, then it is not complicated to characterize the relationship between the eternal God and temporal reality. But it is, indeed, a cheap victory: since the passage of time is not real, the modality of existence of God and of the world are not so different. Much more demanding is trying to reconcile a dynamic metaphysics of time—where the flow of time is a genuine feature of reality—with a timeless conception of God.

Ironically, the most puzzling problems are the free actions and the divine knowledge of the tensed aspects of the world. We have seen how two important and influential contributors (by Stump and Kretzmann, and Leftow) show, in our opinion, some intrinsic flaws. Our proposal is to advocate a different conception of time, that is a version of Kit Fine's Fragmentalism. Even if this theoretical option has relevant theoretical costs, we believe it to be more suitable as far as God's eternal knowledge is concerned. This account preserves two hardly compatible aspects: on the one hand reality is intrinsically temporal (and for that reason, Fine himself defined his theory as a form of non-standard A-theory); on the other, God holds the same relationship with all the temporal facts, that is, He sees reality as (eternally) present. Fragmentalism does not lack internal problems; however, we are not interested in a defence of this particular metaphysics of time. What we would like to argue for is that, *if* accepted, the Fragmentalism provides the best metaphysical framework to account for a timeless view of divine knowledge.

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