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Nelson Pike, 'Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action' (1965)

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Engaging with Pike: God, Freedom, and Time

John Martin Fischer, Patrick Todd, and Neal Tognazzini

Re-reading of Nelson Pike, ‘Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action’, *Philosophical Review* 74 (1) (1965): 27-46*

‘Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action’ is one of the most influential pieces in contemporary Philosophy of Religion.¹ Published over forty years ago, it has elicited many different kinds of replies. We shall set forth some of the main lines of reply to Pike’s article, starting with some of the ‘early’ replies. We then explore some issues that arise from relatively recent work in the philosophy of time; it is fascinating to note that views suggested by recent work in this area and related areas of metaphysics have implications for Pike’s argument—implications perhaps not previously noticed.

I. Pike’s Argument and Various Responses

It will be useful to begin by having before us the central argument of Pike’s paper. He claims that a selection of plausible (although admittedly contentious) assumptions about God’s attributes implies that His existence (so conceived) is incompatible with human freedom, understood as involving genuine access to alternative possibilities (freedom to do otherwise).

Pike assumes that ‘God knows *X*’ entails ‘God believes *X*’ and ‘*X* is

* Editor’s Note: ‘Re-Readings’ is a regular feature in *Philosophical Papers*. Authors are invited to write on a past article, book, or book chapter that they deem, for whatever reason, to deserve renewed attention. Authors are encouraged, where appropriate, to discuss the work’s reception by and influence upon the philosophical community.

¹ Pike (1965).

true.’ Further, Pike holds that the individual who is God is essentially omniscient; that is, it is part of God’s essence that He believes all and only true propositions. Additionally, God is assumed to be essentially ‘eternal’ in the sense of being ‘sempiternal’; that is, it is part of God’s essence that He exists at all times. Given the above assumptions, Pike presents an argument that he summarizes schematically as follows:

1. ‘God existed at t_1 ’ entails ‘If Jones did X at t_2 , God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 .’
2. ‘God believes X ’ entails “‘ X ’ is true.’
3. It is not within one’s power at a given time to do something having a description that is logically contradictory.
4. It is not within one’s power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that someone who held a certain belief at a time prior to the time in question did not hold that belief at the time prior to the time in question.
5. It is not within one’s power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that a person who existed at an earlier time did not exist at that earlier time.
6. If God existed at t_1 and if God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 , then if it was within Jones’s power at t_2 to refrain from doing X , then (1) it was within Jones’s power at t_2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at t_1 , or (2) it was within Jones’s power at t_2 to do something which would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief He held at t_1 , or (3) it was within Jones’s power at t_2 to do something that would have brought it about that any person who believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief and thus was not God—that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at t_1) did not exist at t_1 .

7. Alternative 1 in the consequent of item 6 is false. (from 2 and 3)
8. Alternative 2 in the consequent of item 6 is false. (from 4)
9. Alternative 3 in the consequent of item 6 is false. (from 5)
10. Therefore, if God existed at t_1 and if God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 , then it was not within Jones's power at t_2 to refrain from doing X . (from 6 through 9).
11. Therefore, if God existed at t_1 , and if Jones did X at t_2 , it was not within Jones's power at t_2 to refrain from doing X . (from 1 and 10)²

Pike says that premises (1) and (2) simply make explicit the doctrine of God's essential omniscience with which he is working, premises (3), (4), and (5) express part of the 'logic of the concept of ability or power as it applies to human beings,' and premise (6) is an 'analytic truth.'³

It is fair to say that Pike's paper crystallized an argument for the incompatibility of God's omniscience and human foreknowledge that had been 'around' for perhaps millennia in a way that sharpened the argument and rendered it clear that the argument need not rest on any sort of obvious logical fallacy.⁴ One might also say that Pike did for the argument for incompatibilism about God's foreknowledge and human freedom what such philosophers as Ginet, Wiggins, and Van Inwagen did for the importantly parallel argument for incompatibilism about causal determinism and human freedom.⁵ Additionally, Pike's regimentation of the argument helped to throw into relief different

² Pike (1965), pp. 33-4.

³ Pike (1965), pp. 34-5.

⁴ However, Trenton Merricks (2009) has recently argued that while the best versions of the argument may not fall prey to the fatalist's fallacy, they nevertheless do employ a different sort of logical impropriety, namely begging the question.

⁵ See Wiggins (1973), Van Inwagen (1983), and Ginet (1990). For discussion of the parallels between the argument for incompatibilism about God's omniscience and human freedom and the argument for incompatibilism about causal determinism and human freedom, see Fischer (1994).

strategies of response, some of which he himself noted.

We begin by pointing out that there is nothing magic about the particular way in which Pike formulated the argument; the argument can be reformulated in various different ways that are arguably valid. Thus, if a philosopher objects to a particular aspect of the argument as presented by Pike, we need to consider whether the objection would also apply to other ways of capturing the basic intuitive ingredients in the argument. For example, consider the locution used by Pike, ‘bringing it about that p .’ It appears that Pike is relying on a ‘power entailment principle’ that holds that if an agent has it in his power to bring it about that p , and if p entails q , then the agent has it in his power to bring it about that q .⁶ But power entailment principles of this kind have been attacked by various philosophers.⁷

It is however important to see that, even if such principles are problematic, Pike’s argument can be developed without employing the notion of ‘bringing it about that p ’ and thus without invoking any such principle—or any related principle.⁸ Here is just one such formulation of the argument (holding fixed the assumptions with which Pike works). First, we assume a principle capturing the intuitive idea that the past is fixed:

[FP]: For any action Y , agent S , and time t , if it is true that if S were to do Y at t , some fact about the past relative to t would not have been a fact, then S cannot at t do Y at t .

We can state the argument as follows:

Suppose that God exists and that S does X at $t2$. Now one of the following conditionals must be true:

1. If S were to refrain from doing X at $t2$, then God would have held a false belief at $t1$.

⁶ See Hasker (1985).

⁷ See, for example, Quinn (1985), Talbott (1986), and Hoffin and Rosenkrantz (1980).

⁸ Fischer (1994), p. 63; also, see fn. 12 on pp. 248-9.

2. If *S* were to refrain from doing *X* at *t*₂, then God would not have existed at *t*₁.
3. If *S* were to refrain from doing *X* at *t*₂, then God would have held a different belief from the one He actually held at *t*₁, i.e., God would have believed at *t*₁ that *S* would refrain from doing *X* at *t*₂.

But (1) must be false, in virtue of God's essential omniscience. Further, if (2) were true, then it would follow that *S* cannot refrain from doing *X* at *t*₂. This would seem to follow from [FP]; but even if it turned out that (FP) does not apply to (2) because of worries (to be discussed below) about what facts 'count' as part of the past, it would seem that one could argue from God's counterfactual independence of possible human action to the conclusion that if (2) were true, then *S* cannot refrain from doing *X* at *t*₂. The idea behind God's counterfactual independence of possible human action is plausible: if God is the Supreme Being (and thus 'worthy of worship'), it cannot be the case that his existence would hang on whether or not some ordinary human being performs some ordinary action.⁹ Finally, if (3) were true, then it would seem to follow in virtue of [FP] that *S* cannot refrain from doing *X* at *t*₂. (Again, we employ the locution, 'seems to follow', because of possible worries as to what counts as part of the past, for the purposes of [FP].)¹⁰

We contend that this argument crystallizes the basic intuitive elements of Pike's argument in a way that does *not* depend on a power entailment principle. Further, the argument (or a slightly modified version thereof)

9 One could formulate a principle capturing the notion of God's counterfactual independence of possible human action:

[CI]: For any action *Y*, agent *S*, and time *t*, if God exists and if it is true that if *S* were to do *Y* at *t*, God would not exist, then *S* cannot at *t* do *Y* at *t*.

10 Fischer (1994), pp. 62-3.

appears to be valid.¹¹ Thus, the objections to the Pike's argument based on worries about the power entailment principles can be seen to be relatively superficial.¹²

Pike pointed out that one of the ways of responding to his argument would be to deny the assumption that God is sempiternal; rather, one might suppose that God's eternity consists in His atemporal eternity. An atemporal God would not have any beliefs in the past, and thus an agent's freedom to do otherwise at a given time would not require his so acting that the past would have been different from what it actually was. Thus, Pike noted that placing God outside of time (as did Boethius and Aquinas) would appear to allow one to side-step the worries about the Fixity of the Past.

Recently, both David Widerker and Peter Van Inwagen have presented fascinating arguments against the contention (endorsed by Pike and others) that an atemporal conception of God would allow one to avoid the problems stemming from the Fixity of the Past.¹³ Indeed, the arguments of Widerker and Van Inwagen are similar to Pike's argument, and, if they are sound, they show that an atemporal conception of God cannot avoid the very problems about the fixity of the past highlighted by Pike.

Another approach to resisting Pike's argument that has had considerable appeal, especially in recent years, might be dubbed 'Open Theism.'¹⁴ Open Theism is, we think, considerably more difficult fairly and accurately to define than is commonly appreciated. We suggest that Open Theism should be defined as the thesis that there are things that happen that God has not always believed—and hence has not always

11 Fischer (1996).

12 For another version of the argument, see: Fischer (1994), pp. 88-93.

13 Widerker (1991) and Van Inwagen (2008).

14 Perhaps the most developed and influential philosophical defense of the view is Hasker (1998). While Open Theism certainly involves a particular reply to Pike's argument, it is not merely such a reply. Rather, and especially for those coming at this topic from a theological angle, it is a fully-fledged theological 'research program', advocating a particular account of divine providence, and so on.

known—would happen. About this much, all Open Theists do (and, we think, must) agree. With respect to Pike's argument, this position provides resources to reject premise (1), the premise that from Jones' doing *X* at *t2* it follows that God believed at *t1* that Jones would do *X* at *t2*.

However, there are different versions of Open Theism, and such versions may vary considerably in various details. On one such view, the future is not 'settled'; that is, there are no truths specifying how future indeterminacies will unfold. Moreover, according to these Open Theists, a future free action is a paradigmatic instance of a future indeterminacy. At *t1*, then, it wasn't even *true* that Jones would do *X* at *t2*, supposing Jones does *X* at *t2* freely. And, of course, if a proposition is not true, then it is no strike against a purportedly omniscient being that He does not know (or believe) it.¹⁵ On another version of Open Theism, since Pike's argument is taken to have established that God's foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom, and it is further supposed that we are indeed free, it follows that God cannot know propositions about future free actions (even though some such propositions are true). Here omniscience might be analyzed on the model of omnipotence; just as an omnipotent God can do anything possible (in a suitable sense) for him to do, an omniscient God is taken to know (and thus to believe) everything it is possible (in a suitable sense) for Him to know (and believe).¹⁶

Perhaps the most salient and influential strategy of responding to Pike has been the 'Ockhamist' approach advocated by (among others) Marilyn Adams and Alvin Plantinga.¹⁷ Since it is Ockhamism that is at issue in the next section, we will develop this reply at greater length. The Ockhamist denies premise (8) in Pike's argument, because he contends that the fact that God held a certain belief about the future relative to *t1*

15 For a defense of this sort of Open Theism, see Prior (1962), Lucas (1989) and Rhoda *et al.* (2006). Hartshorne, while himself a *process* theist, also held the view in question. See his (1965).

16 See Swinburne (1993), Hasker (1998), and van Inwagen (2008).

17 For a selection of papers, see Fischer, (ed.), (1989). Also, see Fischer (1992).

is not the sort of fact that is temporally non-relational or (in Pike's phrase) 'over-and-done-with,' and thus subject to the intuitive idea of the fixity of the past. The Ockhamist holds that all temporally non-relational or 'hard' facts about the past are indeed fixed or out of our control, but he denies that God's belief at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 is a hard fact about t_1 . Various Ockhamists have provided accounts of the hard fact/soft fact distinction which, they contend, are independently plausible and also have the result that (say) God's belief at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 is a soft fact about t_1 and thus (in their view) not out of our control at t_2 .¹⁸ Some philosophers, such as Plantinga, do not seek to offer a general account of the hard fact/soft fact distinction, but suggest a 'criterion' for soft facthood—a purportedly sufficient condition; on Plantinga's suggestion, God's belief at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 is a soft fact about t_1 insofar as it entails something intuitively 'about' t_2 in a basic sense, namely, that Jones does X at t_2 .¹⁹

To elaborate: the Ockhamist's claim is that while *hard facts* are plausibly thought to be subject to the principle of the fixity of the past, *soft facts* needn't be fixed (and thus out of our control). In other words, the Ockhamist grants that no agent has it in her power so to act that some hard fact about the past would not have been a fact, but he says that an agent can indeed have it in her power so to act that some *soft fact* about the past would not have been a fact. For instance, suppose that Jones writes a paper at time t_{10} . By the Ockhamist's lights, it follows that

18 See Fischer, (ed.), (1989) and Fischer (1992).

19 If we think of time and space as analogous in the relevant respects, the literature on the distinction between hard and soft facts (temporally nonrelational and temporally relational facts) should in principle be relevant to the literature on the distinction between 'intrinsic' or 'natural' properties and 'extrinsic' or 'mere-Cambridge' properties. It would be interesting to explore whether the analytical devices suggested by various Ockhamists in seeking to analyze the distinction between temporally nonrelational and temporally relational properties could (*mutatis mutandis*) apply to the efforts to analyze the distinction between (say) intrinsic and extrinsic properties. Of course, it might also be illuminating to apply insights from the discussions of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties to the attempts to characterize the difference between hard and soft facts. For some classic discussions of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties, see Lewis (1983a), (1983b), and (1986); and Langton and Lewis (1998).

it was true at an (arbitrary) earlier time, $t1$, that Jones *would* write the paper at $t10$. Now, did Jones have it within his power (at $t10$ or just prior) to refrain from writing the paper? Presumably, he did. But this power is the power so to act that a fact about the past—the (soft) fact that it was true at $t1$ that he would be writing the paper—would not have been a fact. The Ockhamist says that there is nothing objectionable about this power. However, the power so to act that some soft fact about the past would not have been a fact is *not* the more robust power so to act that a *hard* fact about the past would not have been a fact. For instance, the fact that Kennedy was shot is a hard feature of the past; no one now can so act that Kennedy would not have been shot. This feature of the past is ‘over and done with,’ says the Ockhamist.

Now, one might (and the logical fatalist does) resist the Ockhamist claim that we can so act that some soft facts would not have been facts. Why suppose that Jones could so act that it would not have been true that he would write the paper, if it *really was* true ahead of time that he would write it? What difference does the temporal relationality of this fact make? The answer to this question is not obvious. That is, Ockhamists cannot *simply* make the hard/soft fact distinction and claim that we can so act that soft facts would not have been facts. They must explain *why* the softness—the temporal relationality—of these facts makes a difference.

Here the Ockhamist appeals to a claim concerning *explanatory dependence*. The Ockhamist says: do not think of the past fact that Jones would write the paper as *forcing* Jones to write the paper, or *constraining* what Jones has it within his power to do. Rather, think of Jones’ free decision to write the paper as *explaining why it was true* that Jones would write the paper. In other words, says the Ockhamist, Jones’ free decision to write the paper is the *explanatory ground* of the fact that, at $t1$, it was true that he would write the paper. Thus, if Jones’ free decision to write the paper had been other than it was, the facts about what Jones would freely do would have been other than they were. Importantly, then, there is no explanation of Jones’ free decision that proceeds from the truth (at

some past time) that Jones would so decide to the free decision itself. Rather, the fact that it was true that Jones would write the paper is itself explained by Jones' free decision.

In this way, the Ockhamist wants to render unproblematic our having counterfactual power over some soft facts about the past. According to Ockhamist thinking, if one has the power to bring it about that something *is* the case, then one has the power to bring it about that it always *was* the case that it *would be* the case. That is, when Jones brings it about that he freely writes the paper, he brings about the explanatory grounds for the fact that it was always true that he would write it. Had Jones brought about something else, then there always would have been different explanatory grounds for a different fact. Because Jones' free decisions themselves provide the explanatory grounds for the relevant past truths, these past truths cannot be any threat to Jones' freedom. For if Jones' decisions had been different (a fact presumably under his control), the relevant past truths would have simply reflected his decisions. He would have simply brought about a different set of past truths.

What then is the relevant difference between soft and hard facts? If there is such a difference, it would seem to have to lie in the fact that soft facts include 'across time relations', and thus allow that things happening at one time can explain why things are true (or are facts) at another. Thus we have an explanation of the crucial Ockhamist contention that the softness of soft facts makes a difference to their fixity: the relevant soft facts are facts *because* of our free decisions—because we make them so.²⁰

Now, the Ockhamist wishes to employ the same resources she employs in her reply to the above problem of mere 'foretruth' to the problem of divine foreknowledge. That is, the Ockhamist claims that the fact that it was true at *t*1 that Jones would be writing a paper at *t*10 is explanatorily dependent on Jones' free decision. In the same way, God's

²⁰ This claim is made and spelled out in Freddoso 1983.

belief at $t1$ that Jones would write the paper at $t10$ is explanatorily dependent on Jones' free decision. In other words, God believes what he does about Jones' future decisions *because* of Jones' decisions themselves. Thus, according to Ockhamists, God's (admittedly infallible) beliefs about what we do are no threat to our freedom; our free decisions *explain* why God has always had those beliefs. In sum, then, the Ockhamist claims that God's beliefs about our future free decisions are 'soft'—they are temporally relational in the sense that they are explanatorily dependent on the future. Hence, they pose no threat to freedom: we can so act that God would not have believed what he did believe.

Of course, Ockhamism has not elicited universal agreement. Some philosophers would resist the claim that God's beliefs at times (about the future relative to those times) should be considered soft facts about the times in question; thus, on their view, any characterization of the distinction between hard and soft facts that has the result that God's beliefs at a time (about the future relative to that time) are deemed soft should be rejected. Others have argued (in various different ways) that even if God's relevant belief is a soft (or temporally relational) fact about a time, it still is *fixed* and out of our control at subsequent times. Fischer has argued that that God's beliefs have hard elements and thus are fixed precisely in virtue of the fixity of the past.²¹ Hasker argues that God's beliefs would be fixed for reasons other than the fixity of the past, even if God's beliefs are stipulated to be soft.²² Finally, Widerker presents an argument from the possibility of prophecy to the conclusion that even if God's beliefs are soft facts, there are reasons stemming from the fixity of the past to reject Ockhamism.²³ Widerker's argument here is parallel to his argument (mentioned above) against the Atemporalist solution.

Ockhamism has been attractive because it allows one to maintain the traditional model of divine foreknowledge—that whatever happens, God has always known it would happen—while avoiding the challenges of

21 Fischer (1994), esp. pp. 111-30.

22 Hasker (1985).

23 Widerker (1990).

making sense of an atemporal God and preserving the core of the intuitive idea of the fixity of the past. Of course, one could simply deny that the fixity of the past applies even to indisputably hard facts, and thus adopt ‘Multiple-Pasts Compatibilism.’ This would allow one to avoid contentious debates about whether God’s beliefs are soft, or whether they have hard elements; but many find this view counter-intuitive, and a further unattractive feature (for some) is that it would appear to imply compatibilism about *causal determinism* and human freedom.

II. Ockhamism, presentism, and eternalism.

It is fair to say that most criticism of Ockhamism thus far has concerned the distinction between soft and hard facts. However, we believe certain discussions in contemporary philosophy of time have significant implications for the viability of the view. Here, we will try to bring some of these (relatively) new issues to bear on Ockhamism.²⁴

The new issues we have in mind are those having to do with the debate between *presentists* and *eternalists*.²⁵ Presentism is the thesis that only present objects exist; nothing exists at a temporal distance from the present. Said differently, if something exists at all, it exists *right now*.²⁶ Eternalism is the thesis that past, present, and future objects all equally exist. Past objects exist at past times, and future objects exist at future times. Time is thus similar to space. Just as some objects are spatially located far from ‘here’, so some objects are temporally located far from ‘now’. According to the eternalist, then, dinosaurs exist; they simply don’t exist right now, but they exist in the past.²⁷ We think that

24 For an independent and slightly different presentation of the points we make below, see Finch and Rea 2008.

25 For simplicity, we leave out the so-called ‘growing-block’ view, which has it that past and present objects exist, but no future objects exist. However, just as we think Ockhamism is incompatible with presentism, so we think it is incompatible with the growing-block theory. More generally, Ockhamism is (we argue) incompatible with ‘no-futurism,’ the view that no future objects exist. For a defense of the growing-block view, see Tooley (1997).

26 For helpful discussions of presentism, see Zimmerman (1996) and (1998).

27 For a defense of eternalism, see Sider (2001).

Ockhamism, while being perfectly compatible with eternalism, is (arguably) incompatible with presentism. Insofar as eternalism is problematic, this is a cost for Ockhamism. Moreover, some Ockhamists may wish to be presentists. The following is thus a challenge for these theorists.

Since we have already discussed the main features of Ockhamism, it is easy to begin to see the problem with the combination of Ockhamism and presentism. According to Ockhamism, Jones' free decision to write a paper at t_{10} is the explanatory ground of the fact that, at t_1 , God believed he would decide to write the paper. As we pointed out above, this is crucial to the Ockhamist's claim that the relevant soft facts are in our control. But according to presentism, Jones' free decision at t_{10} to write the paper did not exist at t_1 . There simply was no such thing. Thus, since Jones' free decision did not exist, it could not have provided the explanatory grounds of any fact. In particular, it could not have provided the explanatory grounds of the fact that God believed he would decide to write the paper at t_{10} .

We can look at the matter this way. According to presentism, future free decisions do not exist. The only free decisions that exist are those that exist right now, in the present. So future free decisions cannot explain anything. Specifically, they cannot explain why God believed at t_1 that Jones would decide at t_{10} to write the paper. But this conflicts with the Ockhamist claim that our free decisions themselves provide the explanatory grounds for the relevant soft facts about the past.²⁸

The fundamental problem is that presentism cannot allow for the sort of cross-time explanations invoked by Ockhamism. If something is a fact about a moment in 1959, for instance, then, on presentism, only things that exist at that moment in 1959 can be explanatory grounds for this

28 Note, of course, that this argument applies also to the Ockhamist's reply to the problem of 'foretruth'; the fact at t_1 that it was *true* that Jones would decide at t_{10} to write the paper cannot be explanatorily dependent on Jones' decision at t_{10} . Thus, we believe that the Ockhamist reply to *logical fatalism* is incompatible with presentism. However, for our purposes, we focus simply on God's beliefs.

fact. This is simply because nothing else *exists* besides those things that exist at that moment in 1959. Thus, if there *are* explanatory grounds for a fact about a moment in 1959, these grounds must be found in the objects and relations of things existing at that moment. And someone's free decision in (say) 2009 is not among those things.

It is instructive to see why this problem *does not* arise on eternalism. According to eternalists, if in 1959 you made a list of all existing things, someone's free decision in 2009 would make the list. It is thus easy to see how something in 2009 could provide the explanatory grounds for a fact in 1959. What exists in 2009 is every bit as real as what exists in 1959, and the fact in question (while being a fact in 1959) is about 2009.

The analogy with space is (again) perhaps helpful here. It is well known that objects have what have been called 'Cambridge properties'—properties that an object has merely in virtue of how it is related to other objects. For example, Roger may have the property of being 5 miles from someone playing a Les Paul guitar. Of course, this is not an intrinsic property of Roger's, but merely an extrinsic, relational property—a property he has not in virtue of how he is intrinsically but in virtue of how a Les Paul player is related to him. Similarly, the Ockhamist claims that soft facts are *temporally* relational. Importantly, however, we can see that, with respect to Roger's having the property of being 5 miles from someone playing a Les Paul, the guitar player must exist (as Roger does) in order for Roger to have this property. The guitarist must be a *relatum* in order for his existence (and his distance from Roger) to explain Roger's possession of the relevant Cambridge property.

Now, on eternalism, the relationship between someone's free decision in 2008 and the relevant fact about 1958 is like the relationship between the Les Paul player and Roger. With respect to the guitarist, it is his existence at a spatial distance from Roger that grounds his having the relevant Cambridge property. With respect to someone's free decision in 2008 to (say) write a paper, it is its existence in 2008 at a temporal distance from 1958 that grounds the soft fact about 1958. So Ockhamism

seems perfectly congruent with eternalism. But it is equally clear that Ockhamism is incompatible with presentism.

In sum, we think the sort of cross-time explanations invoked by Ockhamists are incompatible with presentism. Since, on presentism, future free decisions do not exist, they cannot explain why certain facts are facts in the past. Specifically, they cannot explain why God holds certain beliefs; the fact that at t_1 God has a certain belief about what a future agent will do at t_{10} cannot be explained by the agent's decision at t_{10} . But this is central to the Ockhamist reply to Pike's argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human free will.²⁹

So Ockhamists (we argue) must be eternalists. Of course, how one regards this commitment will depend on what one thinks of eternalism itself. Many think eternalism is counterintuitive. It is implausible, they say, that we are no more real than the dinosaurs. Presentism is allegedly the commonsense position. Our present purpose, however, is not to argue against eternalism, but merely to point out that many will view Ockhamism's commitment to eternalism as problematic.

Moreover, though these issues have not been explored at sufficient length, there may be particular problems that arise for the conjunction of *theism* and eternalism. For instance, it is plausible that if God exists, he should have (so to speak) immediate 'access' to whatever exists. But if eternalism is true, this would seem to imply that God has immediate access to past, present, and future objects. This in turn may seem to imply that God is atemporal after all, and would bring with it the problems associated with that thesis. Of course, the eternalist theist might suppose that God is (like us) 'in' (and thus extended *over*) time; on this suggestion, God would have temporal parts. But this would seem to conflict with the doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which God

29 Of course, we recognize that there are tricky issues lurking here about explanation and existence, and in particular about whether certain nonexistents can play an explanatory role in the course of events, but we simply assume that even if some nonexistents can play such a role, the particular events the Ockhamists invoke can only do their explanatory work if they exist.

essentially *lacks* parts. Of course, this is merely suggestive, but it is worth noting that theists may have special reason to deny eternalism.

However, even if eternalism can overcome whatever problems it faces, and even if there are no special problems arising from the conjunction of eternalism and theism, we would still like to point out that at least one prominent Ockhamist—Plantinga—*does* wish to be a presentist. Plantinga nowhere explicitly argues for presentism, but he has affirmed it.³⁰ Moreover, our (admittedly fallible and non-exhaustive) anecdotal evidence suggests that many theists are presentists; in fact, it seems (to us, anyway) that theists are disproportionately presentists, for one reason or another. That the most influential and (seemingly) promising reply to Pike’s argument should be unavailable to these theists is a significant result.

III. Another Way Out?

In closing, we would like briefly to present a novel way of responding to Pike’s original argument that employs a distinctive—and sometimes ridiculed—view about the nature of the future. The response we have in mind is a version of Open Theism, so for the sake of clarity, it will help to contrast it with the two versions of Open Theism we discussed above:

[OT1]: The future is not ‘settled’; that is, there are no truths specifying how future indeterminacies (such as free actions) will unfold. Thus, God does not know how such indeterminacies will unfold.

[OT2]: It is logically impossible for God to know those future-tensed truths that concern free human actions, so naturally God does not know them.

Both Open Theist positions can successfully reject premise (1) of Pike’s

³⁰ Plantinga has written in personal correspondence (April 2009) that he is inclined to be a presentist because it fits best with actualism.

argument, the claim that if God existed at t_1 and Jones did X at t_2 , then God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 . On [OT1], God did not believe this because it was not true at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 . On [OT2], God did not believe this (despite its being true) because his believing it was logically impossible, given his divine nature.

But we wish to point out is that there is a third possible Open Theist position. [OT1] has it that there are no truths specifying how future indeterminacies unfold, whereas [OT2] holds that God cannot know such truths. [OT3], the third view we are about to develop, denies both of these theses. On [OT3], there are truths specifying how indeterminate aspects of the future will unfold, *and* God knows these truths. So how can [OT3] be a version of Open Theism, if Open Theism is the thesis that there are things that happen that God has not always known would happen? Doesn't the thesis that there are truths specifying how future indeterminacies unfold together with the thesis that God knows all such truths entail the denial of Open Theism, as defined above? It would appear so. But it would not *be* so, *if the future changes*. [OT3], in contrast with other versions of Open Theism, maintains that God can know truths about future indeterminacies, but that the future changes: the set of future-tensed truths at one time may contain *it will be the case that p* even though the set of future-tensed truths at another time may contain *it will be the case that $\sim p$* .

But how does the future change? Both P.T. Geach and, more recently, Mark Hinchliff, have defended the view that the future changes, and they explain it by employing the idea of *prevention*.³¹ Geach points out that we often think that we have the power to prevent certain events from occurring. To use one of Geach's examples, we might say that although the plane was going to crash, the pilot prevented the disaster by successfully performing some action that helped him regain control. Geach urges that we cannot infer from the simple fact that the plane did not crash that the plane *always was* not going to crash. He says

31 See Geach (1973) and (1977) and Hinchliff (ms).

(1977, p. 48):

But if something did happen, doesn't this show that it was after all going to happen? Certainly; but not that it *always* was going to happen. Perhaps, before the preventative action was taken, not this but something else was going to happen; but then the preventative action was taken, and after that *this* was going to happen and did happen. Before the pilot's daring manoeuvre, the plane was going to crash; but after that the plane was going to land safely and she did land safely.

Similarly, Hinchliff (ms., p. 4) points us to cases like the following: 'The spotted owls were going to become extinct, but now, after logging has been halted, they are going to survive', or again, 'The soldier was going to bleed to death; but now, after a medic happened along, he is going to live.'

What Hinchliff and Geach are claiming these examples show us is that it is possible for *what will be* to change as time goes on and, in particular, as a result of human actions. Although at *t*₁ a passenger on the plane who said 'We are going to crash' spoke the truth, at *t*₂ the pilot also spoke the truth when he said, 'We are not going to crash.' The statements of the pilot and passenger are not in conflict; rather, they are both right at their respective times of utterance. Similarly, the soldier is right to claim that the medic quite literally saved his life: he was going to die, but thanks to the medic, *this is no longer true*.

The 'mutable future view' of Geach and Hinchliff plainly requires the denial of both eternalism and reductionism about tense. We have explained both eternalism and the most common way of denying it—presentism—above. To deny reductionism about tense, in the relevant sense, is to think that there are some propositions that don't have tenseless truth conditions. So, for example, a nonreductionist about tense might say that the truth conditions for the proposition *that the plane will crash* cannot be given in such a way as to eliminate the tense altogether. This is in contrast to reductionists about tense, who would say that the relevant truth conditions can be given by an appropriate quantification over some future time at which the plane crashes. The

nonreductionist says that we must take the *will* seriously—it cannot be eliminated in favor of tenseless discourse.

Philosophers working in past decades (perhaps sometimes as a result of presupposing reductionism) have simply dismissed the view that the future can change. Take for example this gem from J.J.C. Smart (1964, pp. 20-21), also quoted by both Geach and Hinchliff:

It makes no more sense to talk of changing the future than it does of changing the past. Suppose that I decide to change the future, by having coffee for breakfast tomorrow instead of my usual tea. Have I changed the future? No. For coffee for breakfast *was* the future [T]he fact that our present actions determine the future would be most misleadingly expressed or described by saying that we can change the future. A man can change his trousers, his club, or his job But one thing he cannot change is the future, since whatever he brings about *is* the future, and nothing else is, or ever was.

Certainly Smart is here expressing the dominant view; whatever happens is such that it always *would* happen. But as Geach and Hinchliff point out, what we have here is certainly no decisive *argument* against the view that the future changes. Rather, as Geach says, what we have is mere assertion. Of course, no doubt Smart and others would, if challenged, wish to say more against the mutable future view than the above. However, our aim is not to systematically develop and defend the view in question, but simply to show how it is a neglected theoretical possibility. So we set this dispute aside.

Let us return, then, to Pike's original argument. The third version of Open Theism that we have in mind can be developed using the Geach/Hinchliff-inspired view of the changing future as follows:

[OT3]: At a particular time, God knows those true future-tensed propositions that are true as of that time. Nevertheless, future-tensed propositions sometimes change their truth-values. What *will* happen as of now may not have been going to happen as of yesterday, and hence God's knowledge of the future changes accordingly.

A proponent of [OT3] can respond to Pike's argument in one of two ways: deny premise (1), or deny premise (6). According to (1), if God existed at $t1$ and Jones did X at $t2$, then God knew at $t1$ that Jones would do X at $t2$. But depending on the details, it could very well be that at $t1$ Jones *wasn't* going to do X at $t2$, even though as it turned out, Jones did do X at $t2$. In those circumstances, God wouldn't have known at $t1$ that Jones would do X at $t2$ simply because that was false at $t1$ and didn't become true until later. At one time God knows that Jones will X ; at a later time God knows that Jones will Y .

On the other hand, [OT3] might be used to deny premise (6), which is a statement of the trichotomy that if God existed at $t1$ and if God believed at $t1$ that Jones would do X at $t2$, then if it was within Jones's power at $t2$ to refrain from doing X , either it was within Jones's power to bring it about that God held a false belief, or that God did not hold the belief he did, or that God did not exist. If we accept [OT3], however, a fourth option becomes available, namely that it was within Jones's power to bring it about that although God still existed, and still held the same belief (which was true) at $t1$, God comes to hold a different belief thanks to the fact that the future has changed. And whereas there is good reason to suppose that each member of the original trichotomy is false, there is no such reason to suppose the same about this fourth option if [OT3] is true: God simply adjusts his beliefs in response to the changing future.

Here ends our very brief discussion of [OT3]. Clearly, we have neither articulated all the arguments defenders of the view might offer, nor have we considered—let alone responded to—all the various objections which the view might face.³² However, we do think that the view deserves more attention than it has thus far received, and perhaps the status of a serious theoretical contender amongst versions of Open Theism. Of course, if one is an eternalist and a reductionist about

³² One of us is independently developing this view in more detail. See Patrick Todd, 'Geachianism', unpublished manuscript.

tense, one thinks that the future is real and eternally settled. The mutable future view is thus a non-starter. But eternalism and reductionism certainly are not *mandatory*. Presentist ‘open-future’ views have had a noticeable raise in profile in recent years. It is thus only appropriate that a new version thereof should enjoy some time in the limelight.³³

IV. Conclusion

The early literature in reply to Pike tended to focus on the Ockhamist response; in particular, it generally sought to characterize the distinction between hard and soft facts and to determine whether God’s beliefs (about subsequent times) are hard or soft facts about the times at which they are held. Over time emphasis has shifted toward various versions of Open Theism.

We have argued that Ockhamism appears to be incompatible with presentism and seems to require eternalism. If so, then the perhaps principal way of reconciling the traditional model of divine foreknowledge—that whatever happens, God has always known it would happen—with human freedom seems to require an eminently contestable metaphysical picture about the nature of time. That Ockhamism should require eternalism is perhaps a surprising result, but none the worse for that. Certainly, many would view such a result to be problematic for (and perhaps decisive against) Ockhamism. Open Theism would thus be a theoretical beneficiary of such a result, including the novel and underdeveloped version of Open Theism we have briefly

³³ Note: in his (1977), Geach develops the view that the future changes in the context of a discussion of God’s omniscience. [OT3] is, we believe, the plain consequence of what Geach there suggested. However, Geach (surprisingly) never explicitly says that there are things which happen which God has not always known would happen. In short, he does not explicitly formulate how the distinctive view he proposed enables a reply to Pike-style arguments, as we have done here. It is in this sense that the view is novel, although it is plainly inspired by Geach.

presented here.³⁴

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³⁴ We are very grateful to helpful comments on a previous version of this paper by Ward Jones.

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