

## ***Truthmaking and Divine Eternity***

Kevin Timpe

Department of Philosophy  
University of San Diego  
5998 Alcalá Park  
San Diego, CA 92110  
ktimpe@sandiego.edu

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### **ABSTRACT**

According to a widespread tradition in philosophical theology, God is necessarily simple and eternal. One objection to this view of God's nature is that it would rule out God having foreknowledge of non-determined, free human actions insofar as simplicity and eternity are incompatible with God's knowledge being causally dependent on those actions. According to this view, either (a) God must causally determine the free actions of human agents, thus leading to a theological version of compatibilism, or (b) God cannot know, and thus cannot respond to, the free actions of human agents. In the present paper, I argue that one can consistently maintain that God is not causally dependent on anything, even for His knowledge, without being committed to either (a) or (b). In other words, an eternal God can know the free actions of agents even if libertarianism is true.

### **SIMPLICITY, ETERNITY, AND TWO RELATED OBJECTIONS**

According to a widespread tradition in philosophical theology, God is necessarily simple and eternal. At the heart of the claim that God is necessarily

simple is the belief that it is a necessary truth that God lacks composition of any sort. Eleonore Stump captures the doctrine of divine simplicity as comprising four central claims:

- (1) God cannot have any spatial or temporal parts.
- (2) God cannot have any intrinsic accidental properties.
- (3) There cannot be any real distinction between one essential property and another in God's nature.
- (4) There cannot be a real distinction between essence and existence in God.<sup>1</sup>

While claims (2) through (4) are important, for present purposes I want to limit my attention to the first of these four claims because of its relation to the doctrine of divine eternity. The second disjunct of claim (1), that is, the claim that God necessarily has no temporal parts, is often thought to imply that God is not a temporal entity. The only way an object could lack temporal parts is to either be a temporal, but instantaneous, entity, or to be a non-temporal entity. Proponents of divine simplicity opt for the second alternative for obvious reasons. This leads, then, to a discussion of divine eternity.

The claim that God is eternal is sometimes taken to be the claim that God exists at every moment of time. Understood in this way, God would have temporal parts, contrary to claim (1) above. More often, this view is referred to as 'divine everlastingness' and the claim that God is eternal is taken to mean that God is a non-temporal or timeless entity, that is, that God doesn't exist in time at all. It is this second understanding of eternity that I intend to discuss in the present paper. The classical articulation of divine eternity is found in Boethius'

*The Consolation of Philosophy.*

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<sup>1</sup> Eleonore Stump 'Simplicity' in P Quinn and C. Taliaferro (eds.) *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 250.

That God is eternal, then, is the common judgment of all who live by reason. Let us therefore consider what eternity is, for this makes plain to us both the divine nature and knowledge. Eternity, then, is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life. This becomes clearer by comparison with temporal things. For whatever lives in time proceeds as something present from the past into the future, and there is nothing placed in time that can embrace the whole extent of its life equally.<sup>2</sup>

Aquinas also provides a succinct articulation of divine eternity: 'God is entirely without motion and therefore is not measured by time ... He is therefore without beginning and without end, having all His being at once, wherein consists the essence of eternity.'<sup>3</sup>

As this brief discussion suggests, divine simplicity entails divine eternity.<sup>4</sup> However, it doesn't appear that the entailment runs the other way. Brian Leftow, for example, argues that it does not.<sup>5</sup> While I am persuaded by Leftow's argument, nothing of substance in what follows hangs on this being the case. In what follows, I will proceed by focusing on divine eternity rather than simplicity for the following reason. If Leftow is wrong and simplicity and eternity mutually entail each other, then any objection to one of these doctrines will also be an objection to the other. However, if Leftow is correct, then an objection to divine eternity will also be an objection to divine simplicity, but not vice versa. In other words, if the objections to divine eternity that I consider below are good objections, then they would undermine divine eternity *and* divine simplicity whether or not eternity entails simplicity.

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<sup>2</sup> Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy* book 5, prose 6 as quoted by Eleonore Stump *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 132.

<sup>3</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.15. See also *Summa Theologiae* Ia.10.1 and 10.2.

<sup>4</sup> See also Brian Leftow *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 155-157.

<sup>5</sup> See Leftow *Time and Eternity*, 70f. However, on page 2, Leftow writes 'we will see that within the theological tradition that concerns us, "God is eternal" asserts that God is in no way in time and also entails two other claims, that God is metaphysically 'simple' and that God is alive'.

There are a number of philosophical objections to the doctrine of divine eternity. Some philosophers argue that the idea of an eternal God is incoherent.<sup>6</sup> Others argue that it leads to absurdities,<sup>7</sup> that the doctrine isn't biblical,<sup>8</sup> or that an eternal God couldn't act in time.<sup>9</sup> Still others object that divine eternity rules out all contingency in the world.<sup>10</sup> My aim in the present paper is not to canvas all these objections to the doctrine of divine eternity; rather I want to focus solely on two further, but interrelated, objections. According to this first of these, which I'll call the Responsiveness Objection, the doctrine of divine eternity is incompatible with God's being responsive to human actions. The Responsiveness Objection can be summarized as follows:

Responsiveness Objection:

According to the doctrine of divine eternity, God is a non-temporal entity. But in order for God to be responsive to human agents, God would have to do something only because of what a human agent does. But if God does something only because of what a human agent does, then that agent causally affects God. However, the doctrine of eternity rules out God's being causally affected by anything outside of Himself, since to be causally affected is a kind of change, and change requires time.

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<sup>6</sup> Alvin Plantinga, for instance, writes that he is 'inclined to believe that this thesis—the thesis that God is both atemporal and such that everything is present for him—is incoherent' ('On Ockham's way out' in J. Sennett (ed.) *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 262). For a weaker evaluation of divine eternity as 'mistaken', 'a host of needless perplexities', and 'utterly opaque', see his 'Does God have a nature?' in Sennett (ed.) *The Analytic Theist*, 234. In an interesting paper, Steven B. Cowan argues for the opposite conclusion that the doctrine of divine temporality is incoherent ('A *reductio ad absurdum* of divine temporality', *Religious Studies*, **32** (1996), 371-378).

<sup>7</sup> See Stephen T. Davis *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> See William Hasker 'Does God change?', in S. Cahn and D. Shatz (eds.) *Questions about God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 137-145; and Nicholas Wolterstorff 'God everlasting' in C. Orlebeke and L. Smedes (eds.) *God and the Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 181-203.

<sup>9</sup> See Nelson Pike *God and Timelessness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 104ff.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, David Ray Griffin *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), 74ff.

The Responsiveness Objection is closely related to, and perhaps based on, a second objection. This objection, which I'll call the Knowledge Objection, focuses on the kind of knowledge that God would have to have in order to be responsive.

Knowledge Objection:

If libertarianism is true, then it is not the case that all of agents' actions are determined by antecedent causes outside of their control (including God). But if God isn't the ultimate cause of an agent's action, then He does not know about that action in virtue of causing it. Instead, God actually has the knowledge that He does because of the agent's free action. Thus, God is dependent on the agent's action for His knowledge. However, if God's knowledge is dependent on another agent's action, then that agent's action causally affects God. However, the doctrine of eternity rules out God's being causally affected by anything outside of Himself, since to be causally affected is a kind of change, and change requires time.

The Responsiveness Objection seems to be based on the Knowledge Objection in that for God to be responsive to an agent, God would have to have the relevant knowledge of the agent or her actions. For this reason, I'll first focus on the Knowledge Objection, and then will later return to discussing the Responsiveness Objection.

A number of philosophers raise versions of the Knowledge Objection.

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange uses a version of the Knowledge Objection to argue for theological determinism:

God is either *determining* or *determined*, there is no other alternative.... The knowledge of God is the CAUSE of our free determinations, or else it is CAUSED by them.... The knowledge of God either measures things or is measured by them. Only anthropomorphism can admit the second term of the dilemma and therefore, from sheer necessity, we must keep to the first. There is no other solution.... If the divine causality is not *predetermining* with regard to our *choice*, ... the divine knowledge is fatally

*determined* by it.... It becomes consequently quite clear for one who speaks seriously and does not wish to trifle with words, that *the foreknowledge* is *passive* when one positively asserts that this *difference* does not come from God.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Katherine Rogers argues that according to the doctrine of divine simplicity

the actions of creatures cannot have any causal effect on God at all.... So even God's knowledge of the actions of creatures cannot be caused by what those creatures do. This view can be squared with compatibilism, but it seems to me impossible to posit creatures who are free in a libertarian sense but to deny that it is the choices of these creatures which produces God's knowledge of these choices.<sup>12</sup>

There are also other advocates of the Knowledge Objection, though for present purposes these two indicative expressions of the objection should be sufficient.<sup>13</sup>

As these quotations indicate, Garrigou-Lagrange and Rogers think that if something other than God determines His knowledge, then that thing causally affects God's knowledge. However, the doctrine of divine eternity precisely rules out God's being causally dependent on anything. If God is causally affected by something, then He is changed by that thing. But change presupposes temporality, and an eternal entity is precisely non-temporal. So an eternal entity cannot be causally affected by anything outside of itself. Thus, it looks as if the only way an eternal God could know the free actions of humans is if He were to

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<sup>11</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange *God: His Existence and His Nature* (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1955), 546f and 538.

<sup>12</sup> Katherine A. Rogers *The Anselmian Approach to God* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), v.

<sup>13</sup> Leo Elders argues that 'God's knowledge of things other than himself can only be based on his causality. He knows things because he is their cause and he knows them in and through his causality.... The foundation of his knowledge must be a conditional decree of his will' (*The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1990), 230 and 241). And Brian Shanley writes that 'God's knowledge is not effected by and dependent upon what is known, but rather is itself causative of what is known' ('Eternal knowledge of the temporal in Aquinas', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, **71** (1997), 205).

determine those actions. It is for this reason that Garrigou-Lagrange embraces both theological determinism and compatibilism such that humans act freely even though they are causally determined to act as they do by God.<sup>14</sup> Thus, according to Garrigou-Lagrange, God can know the actions of humans only insofar as He causes those actions. Note, however, that while embracing theological determinism might thus avoid the Knowledge Objection, it does so at the expense of conceding the Responsiveness Objection—for it is hard to see how God is responsive if He determines everything. Furthermore, there are numerous reasons why one might not want to accept theological determinism and compatibilism, though I won't pursue those reasons here.<sup>15</sup> In what follows, I will focus on how one might respond to the Responsiveness and Knowledge objections without rejecting libertarianism.

Others have given what I take to be convincing rebuttals to the Responsiveness and Knowledge Objections elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> yet not all are convinced. My aim in what follows is to give a new reply to these objections which, while in the same spirit as those given by others, makes use of the

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<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Rogers argues that human agents have free will and that incompatibilism is true, but that as a result free creatures contribute to God's nature. For example, Rogers argues that 'on the traditional doctrine of simplicity, if rational creatures have libertarian freedom then they contribute to God's freedom. This is a rather shocking conclusion on which the believer in freedom and divine simplicity may just have to bite the bullet' ('The traditional doctrine of divine simplicity', *Religious Studies*, **32** (1996), 166).

<sup>15</sup> For a brief discussion of some of the issues involved here, see my 'Why christians might be libertarians: a reply to Lynne Rudder Baker', *Philosophia Christi*, **6** (2004), 89-98.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Stump, *Aquinas*, particularly ch. 4 and ch. 5.

metaphysics of truthmaking. It is my hope that focusing on truthmaking will help show exactly where these objections go wrong.<sup>17</sup>

## TRUTHMAKING

The metaphysics of truthmaking is one way of approaching the relation between the world and truths about the world. At its core, the truthmaking principle holds that truth depends on reality, or to put it another way, that certain propositions are true because there is something in the world that makes them true, namely a truthmaker.<sup>18</sup> Truthmakers are needed for true propositions so that that truth doesn't, as David Lewis has pithily put it, 'float in a void'.<sup>19</sup> If one denies the need for truthmakers, it looks as if what propositions are true is simply a primitive or brute fact. True propositions are true, but their truth is not to be explained in terms of anything else. In contrast, truthmaking holds that a truthmaker 'makes true' a true proposition, or 'grounds' it, or 'suffices' for it; one could also say that a true proposition 'owes' its truth-value to the truthmaker. Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra captures the fundamental insight of truthmaking as the claim that 'being and truth are importantly and asymmetrically related by a relation of grounding. Truth depends on being in that it is grounded on being—being is the ground of truth'.<sup>20</sup> And according to J. L. Austin, truthmaker theory

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<sup>17</sup> See also Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower 'A theistic argument against platonism (and in support of truthmakers and divine simplicity)', (forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*) for another article on the relationship between truthmaking and God's nature.

<sup>18</sup> Following a fairly widespread tendency, in what follows I will speak of propositions being the primary truth-bearers, thinking that while sentences can also be true, they will be true only if they succeed in expressing true propositions.

<sup>19</sup> David Lewis 'Critical notice of D. M. Armstrong, *A Combinatorial Theory of Possibility*', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **70** (1992), 218.

<sup>20</sup> Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra *Resemblance Nominalism: A Solution to the Problem of Universals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 33.



enjoys a certain degree of obviousness: 'When a statement is true, there is, *of course*, a state of affairs which makes it true.'<sup>21</sup>

Truthmaking has recently received much explicit attention, culminating in the first book-length treatment of truthmaking, D. M. Armstrong's 2004 *Truth and Truthmakers*,<sup>22</sup> as well as the more recent *Truthmakers: The Contemporary Debate*.<sup>23</sup> In contemporary philosophy, one finds explicit incorporation of the metaphysics of truthmaking in a variety of metaphysical issues: the correspondence theory of truth,<sup>24</sup> discussions of supervenience,<sup>25</sup> accounts of dispositions and other counterfactuals,<sup>26</sup> the realism/nominalism debate,<sup>27</sup> the philosophy of mathematics,<sup>28</sup> and the presentist/eternalist debate.<sup>29</sup>

Truthmaking has also been linked to issues in the free will debate.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the truthmaking principle is so prevalent in contemporary metaphysics that Julian

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<sup>21</sup> J. L. Austin 'Truth', in G. Pitcher (ed.) *Truth* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 23.

<sup>22</sup> D. M. Armstrong *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> H. Beebe and J. Dodd (eds.) *Truthmakers: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, David Lewis 'Forget about the "correspondence theory of truth"', *Analysis*, **61** (2001), 275-280.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Andrew Melnyk 'On the metaphysical utility of global supervenience claims', *Philosophical Studies*, **87** (1997), 277-308.

<sup>26</sup> See D. M. Armstrong, C. B. Martin, and U. T. Place *Dispositions: A Debate* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> See John Bigelow *The Reality of Numbers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); D. M. Armstrong *Universals: an Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989) and *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John F. Fox 'Truthmaker', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **65** (1987), 188-207. For a response to the truthmaker argument against nominalism, see Josh Parsons 'There is no "truthmaker" argument against nominalism', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **77** (1999), 325-334.

<sup>28</sup> See Bigelow *The Reality of Numbers*, *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> See Simon Keller 'Presentism and truthmaking' in D. Zimmerman (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* volume I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 83-104; and Mike Rea 'Four-dimensionalism', in M. Loux and D. Zimmerman (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 246-280.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, the articles by Edward Wierenga, William Hasker, Tom Flint and Robert Adams in W. Hasker, D. Basinger, and E. Dekker (eds.) *Middle Knowledge: Theory and Applications* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2000), as well as John Perry 'Compatibilist options' in J. Campbell, M. O'Rourke, and D. Shier (eds.) *Freedom and Determinism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004).

Dodd remarks that ‘the current *Zeitgeist* has it that the question to be answered is not *whether* the principle itself (or a version thereof) is correct, but *how* the details of a theory of truthmaking should be fleshed out’.<sup>31</sup>

While there are a few metaphysicians who deny truthmaking, the bulk of the disagreement regarding truthmaking is found in delineating exactly how the truthmaker principle should be expressed. Here are a few representative samples:

‘By the truthmaker axiom I mean the axiom that for every truth there is a truthmaker; by a truthmaker for *A*, I mean something whose very existence entails *A*.’<sup>32</sup>

‘According to the truth-maker principle, if a statement about the world is true, there is something about the world in virtue of which it is true.’<sup>33</sup>

‘If something is true, then *there must be*, that is to say, there must *exist*, something which makes the actual world different from how it would have been if this had not been true.’<sup>34</sup>

‘For any proposition *P* and any world *W*, if *P* is true in *W*, there exists something *T* in world *W* such that for any world *V*, if *T* exists in *V*, then *P* is true in *V*.’<sup>35</sup>

In addition to disagreement about the exact formulation of the truthmaking principle, there is also significant disagreement over how truthmaking theory should respond to a number of challenges, such as accounting for what the

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<sup>31</sup> Julian Dodd ‘Is truth supervenient on being?’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, **102** (2002), 70 (italics added). It should be noted that Dodd rejects truthmaking: ‘My convention is that the truthmaker principle ... cannot be respectably motivated’ (*ibid.* 71). While I think Dodd’s criticisms of truthmaking fail, partially because I think she fails to realize the role that tropes play in many formulations of truthmakers, developing this response in the present paper would take us too far afield.

<sup>32</sup> Fox ‘Truthmaker’, 189.

<sup>33</sup> C. B. Martin and John Heil ‘The ontological turn’, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, **23** (1999), 38.

<sup>34</sup> Bigelow *The Reality of Numbers*, 126.

<sup>35</sup> David Lewis ‘Truthmaking and difference-making’, *Nous*, **35** (2001), 606.

truthmakers are for negative existential truths,<sup>36</sup> necessary truths,<sup>37</sup> and other modal truths.<sup>38</sup>

While resolving these disputed issues is an important task for truthmaking theorists, as Peter Simons notes, 'it should not be thought that rejecting [a] particular truthmaking package entails rejecting truthmaking as such'.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Armstrong suggests that we separate a general theory of truthmaking from questions about the particular kinds of truthmakers that exist for particular truths, such as negative truths. Following Simons' and Armstrong's lead, I am less concerned in the present article with the exact specification of truthmaking or whether it can handle these problematic cases than I am with how truthmaking theory can help us see why the Responsiveness and Knowledge Objections fail. Furthermore, given that the true propositions involved in the Responsiveness and Knowledge objections are existential propositions concerning free human actions rather than negative existential or modal propositions, I can set these controversial cases to the side.

There is one final issue regarding truthmaking that needs addressed, namely the controversy regarding what the relevant truthmakers are. Numerous entities have been suggested as truthmakers. For instance, Lewis suggests *qua-*

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Peter Simons 'Negatives, numbers, and necessity: some worries about Armstrong's version of truthmaking', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **83** (2005), 253–261; Stephen Mumford 'The true and the false', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **83** (2005), 263–269; George Molnar 'Truthmakers for negative truths', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **78** (2000), 72–86; and Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons and Barry Smith 'Truth-makers', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, **44** (1984), 287–321.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 300f. Cf. Stephen Read 'Truthmakers and the disjunction thesis', *Mind*, **109** (2000), 67–79; Lewis 'Truthmaking and difference-making', 604; Greg Restall 'Truthmakers, entailment and necessity', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **74** (1996), 331–340.

<sup>38</sup> See Armstrong *Truth and Truthmakers*, particularly ch. 7 and ch. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Simons 'Negatives, numbers, and necessity', 253.

versions of things, which are based on certain counterpart relations;<sup>40</sup> Armstrong suggests states of affairs or facts;<sup>41</sup> while Mulligan, Simons and Smith suggest tropes.<sup>42</sup> In the present paper, I will assume that the relevant truthmakers are actions, and I'll conceive of actions as particulars. However, those who prefer truthmakers of a different ontological kind are free to substitute their preferred truthmakers for actions. For example, those who prefer facts as truthmakers could replace my discussion of actions as truthmakers with the corresponding facts that an agent performs the relevant free action. So far as I can tell, nothing of importance for the objections under consideration here hangs on these issues.

### REBUTTING THE KNOWLEDGE OBJECTION

I will address the Knowledge Objection first. In responding to this objection, it will be helpful to look more closely at the truthmaking relationship that holds between truthmakers and truth-bearers. Let an action  $A$ 's being the truthmaker for a particular proposition  $p$  be symbolized as

$$A \vDash p$$

Focusing on a particular action, we have the action 'Allison's eating chocolate at time  $t$ ' serving as the truthmaker for the proposition *Allison eats chocolate at time  $t$* , or

$$\text{Allison's eating of chocolate at } t \vDash \textit{Allison eats chocolate at time } t$$

Given the common assumption that the objects of knowledge are true propositions, we can also say that actions serve as the truthmakers for the content of an individual's knowledge. For example, I can know *Allison eats*

<sup>40</sup> Lewis 'Things qua truthmakers', 27ff.

<sup>41</sup> Armstrong *A World of States of Affairs*, *passim*.

<sup>42</sup> Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 'Truth-makers', 278-321.

*chocolate at time t* only if *Allison eats chocolate at time t* is true. I will represent an agent  $X$ 's knowing that  $p$  is true as:  $X_k p$ . Let us then define the Truthmaking Claim for Knowledge (TMK) as follows:

(TMK) =<sub>df</sub> An action  $A$  is the truthmaker for the content of  $X$ 's knowledge that  $p$  is true if (i)  $X$  knows  $p$  and (ii)  $A$  is the truthmaker for  $p$  (that is, if  $X_k p$  and  $A \vDash p$ ).<sup>43</sup>

Let me be clear that I'm not suggesting that (TMK) directly follows from the truthmaking principle, whatever its exact formulation. I grant that it is possible that  $p$  be true and for  $X$  not to know  $p$ ; in these cases, the truthmaker for  $p$  will not insure that  $X_k p$ . Returning to our previous example, the action of Allison's eating chocolate is the truthmaker for the proposition *Allison is eating chocolate*, but this in no way insures that some individual, say Lloyd, knows that Allison is eating chocolate. Perhaps Lloyd is in the other room, or is napping, or has never met Allison. In any of these cases, *Allison is eating chocolate* can be true and yet Lloyd not know it. Thus, a particular instance of the truthmaking relationship does not entail that the related instance of (TMK) will also be true precisely because it is possible that  $A \vDash p$  and yet it not be the case that  $X_k p$ . Ignorance, we might say, can drive a wedge between truthmaking and (TMK).

However, in the case of an omniscient God, there exists no such wedge. Attempts to specify the exact nature and scope of divine attributes are notorious for being the grounds of significant disagreement, and omniscience is no

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<sup>43</sup> I intend (TMK) to be understood *de dicto* rather than *de re*. Understood *de re*, (TMK) is too strong insofar as (i) is not required for  $A$  to be the truthmaker of  $p$ . Instead, in speaking of  $A$  as the truthmaker for the *content of X's knowledge that p*, I understand that 'content' to be a proposition *qua* known and not merely *qua* true. It is this notion that the addition of (i), and the discussion in the next few paragraphs, is supposed to capture.

exception. For present purposes, I will adopt the following relatively common definition of omniscience:

A being  $X$  is omniscient *iff*

- (i) for every true proposition  $p$ ,  $X$  knows  $p$  and
- (ii) there exists no proposition  $p$  such that  $X$  believes  $p$  and  $p$  is false.<sup>44</sup>

If God is omniscient in this manner, then for every  $A$  and  $p$  such that  $A$  is the truthmaker for  $p$  (i.e.,  $A \models p$ ), then  $A$  will also be the truthmaker for the content of  $X$ 's knowledge that  $p$  is true. In other words, what makes it the case that God knows *Allison is eating chocolate* is the conjunction of God's knowing every true proposition and the action that is Allison's eating the chocolate. Furthermore, if God is necessarily omniscient, then the connection between the truthmaking principle and (TMK) as applied to God will itself be a necessary relation.

At the core of the Knowledge Objection is the idea that (TMK) as applied to God's knowledge is incompatible with divine simplicity. But note in the examples of the Knowledge Objection from Garrigou-Lagrange and Rogers above the prevalence of causal language. Garrigou-Lagrange, for instance, writes that 'the knowledge of God is the CAUSE of our free determinations, or else it is CAUSED by them'.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Rogers writes that 'the actions of creatures cannot have any causal effect on God at all.... So even God's knowledge of the actions of creatures cannot be caused by what those creatures

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<sup>44</sup> According to Edward Wierenga, however, condition (ii) here is at least redundant and possibly incoherent, since the addition of (ii) to (i) seems to presuppose the possible of God knowing all true propositions and yet still having a false belief. See his *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 39.

<sup>45</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange *God: His Existence and His Nature*, 546.

do'.<sup>46</sup> As these quotations show, both Garrigou-Lagrange and Rogers associate (TMK) with a causal principle. Though neither Garrigou-Lagrange nor Rogers is explicit at this point, the following seems to be the kind of causal principle they have in mind (where  $A \rightarrow B$  means that  $B$  is causally dependent on  $A$ ):

(CP) =<sub>df</sub> If a human free action  $A$  is the truthmaker for  $p$  and  $X$  knows  $p$ , then  $X$ 's knowing  $p$  is causally dependent on  $A$  (that is, if  $A \vDash p$  and  $X_k p$  then  $A \rightarrow X_k p$ ).

I'm not suggesting that either Garrigou-Lagrange or Rogers fails to appreciate the difference between truthmaking as expressed in (TMK) and the causal principle as expressed in (CP); after all, neither explicitly embraces (CP) nor says something that entails that they must accept (CP). Nevertheless, I think that the above quotations expressing the Knowledge Objection show that Garrigou-Lagrange and Rogers think that (TMK) is fundamentally intertwined with something along the lines of (CP). Without some causal principle such as (CP) in place, it is hard to see how the Knowledge Objection is supposed to go. It is precisely this association that underwrites the inference from the causation involved in (CP) being incompatible with divine eternity to the claim that God's knowledge cannot depend on the free actions of human agents.

I admit that there is intuitive plausibility to this association of (TMK) and (CP). An agent's action often serves both as the truthmaker for a proposition about that action and as an efficient cause of another agent's coming to know that proposition, given some appropriate epistemic contact between the second agent and the action of the first agent. For example, consider a case involving Lloyd's coming to know *Allison is eating chocolate at time t*. Let us assume that

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<sup>46</sup> Rogers *The Anselmian Approach to God*, v.

Lloyd has the appropriate epistemic contact with Allison's action at  $t$ —that is, let us assume that he is in the same room as Allison, that the room is well lit, that Lloyd's visual faculties are working properly, etc.... In this case, Allison's act of eating chocolate at time  $t$  serves as both the truthmaker for the proposition *Allison is eating chocolate at time  $t$*  and is also an efficient cause of Lloyd's coming to know this proposition. The connection between (TMK) and (CP) could also hold for an omniscient but temporal God. If God is temporal, then He could be caused to have knowledge of a proposition by the truthmaker for that proposition. In these cases, then, the cause of the knowledge and the truthmaker for the proposition are the same. In other words,

$$A \models p, \text{ and} \\ A \rightarrow X_k p.$$

I have already conceded that the later claim ( $A \rightarrow X_k p$ ) is inconsistent with divine eternity. If God is eternal, then God cannot be causally affected by anything outside of Himself. Thus, if (TMK) and (CP) are fundamentally intertwined, as the proponents of the Knowledge Objection seem to suppose, then divine eternity would be incompatible with God knowing the free actions of creatures.

However, proponents of truthmaking stress that the truthmaking relation isn't a causal relation. Instead it is an example of what Jaegwon Kim has elsewhere called an asymmetric, non-causal dependency relation.<sup>47</sup> For example, consider the following passage from John Bigelow:

But what is it for something to 'make' something true? Consider a potter who makes a pot: Is he or she the truthmaker for the truth that there is a pot? No, not in the relevant sense. A truthmaker should 'make' something true, not in a causal sense, but rather, in

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<sup>47</sup> See Jaegwon Kim 'Noncausal connections', *Nous*, 8 (1974), 41-52.



what is presumably a logical sense. A truthmaker is that in virtue of which something is true. And yet we should not rest content with an explanation which turns on the notion of *virtue!* I urge that what the Truthmaker axiom is really saying is this: Whenever something is true, there must be something whose existence entails that it is true. The ‘making’ in ‘making true’ is essentially logical entailment.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, Dodd writes that ‘it is plain that the necessity involved [in truthmaking] cannot be causal. The supposed insight expressed by the truthmaker principle is not that a proposition is made true in a way akin to that in which the sun makes the earth warm’.<sup>49</sup> Instead, Dodd thinks that we should think of a truthmaker ‘guaranteeing’ the truth of the truth-bearer. Finally, Bergmann and Brower write that ‘despite the connotations of its [i.e., the truthmaker principle’s] name, the notion is *not* to be understood in causal terms (i.e., literally in terms of *making*)’.<sup>50</sup> The truthmaking relation thus isn’t a causal relation, but rather a form of ‘cross-categorical’ necessitation.<sup>51</sup>

Not only is the truthmaking relation not causal, but there is also reason to think that it is possible for (TMK) and (CP) to come apart, particularly as applied

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<sup>48</sup> Bigelow *The Reality of Numbers*, 125. Bigelow qualifies this in a number of ways in the following pages, the most important for present purposes being the following: ‘Truthmaker should not be construed as saying that an *object* entails a truth; rather, it requires that the propositions *that that object exists* entails the truth in question’ (ibid., 126). See also footnotes 50 and 51 below.

<sup>49</sup> Dodd ‘Is truth supervenient on being?’, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Bergmann and Brower ‘A theistic argument against platonism’, 14 in manuscript. Bergmann and Brower continue that ‘on the contrary, it is to be understood in terms of broadly logical entailment’ (ibid.). While Bergmann and Brower accept that truthmakers literally entail true propositions, they are willing to concede that some may prefer to speak of the proposition that a truthmaker exists entails the truth. In other words, if *A* is the truthmaker for *p*, Bergmann and Brower accept that *A* entails *p*, while others prefer to say that the propositions *A exists* entails *p*. Nothing here hinges on this preference.

<sup>51</sup> It is precisely because the truthmaking relation is a cross-categorical relation that it can be neither causation nor entailment. In causation (at least of the deterministic variety), something particular necessitates something else particular; in entailment, the truth value of one proposition necessitates the truth value of another proposition. But truthmaking involves a particular necessitating the truth value of a proposition. If we speak loosely of *A* being the truthmaker for a proposition *p*, and mean by that that the propositions *A exists* entails *p* as many people do, we still are left with the truthmaking relation between *A* and *A exists*.

to an eternal God. If this is so, then the proponent of divine eternity could grant that (CP) is incompatible with divine eternity without also having to say that (TMK) is likewise incompatible. According to the doctrine of divine eternity, God is outside of time, and thus His beliefs don't change as a result of *A*; the occurrence of *A* doesn't cause God to have different beliefs than He previously had. As Aquinas says, 'there can be nothing caused in God, since He is the first cause'.<sup>52</sup> In other words, divine eternity rules out the causal dependence that is required by (CP). Nevertheless, the incompatibility of (CP) and divine eternity doesn't mean that divine eternity is similarly incompatible with (TMK). The doctrine of divine eternity claims that whatever beliefs God has, He timelessly has. But this claim makes no mention of what serves as the truthmaker for the propositions that God timelessly knows. It is possible for the propositions that God timelessly believes to be made true by temporal truthmakers such as human actions. In other words, while (TMK) requires a kind of dependency between God's knowledge and the truthmakers for the propositions He knows, this dependency is not a causal dependency.

Instead, the truth of a true proposition *p* is counterfactually grounded in the existence of its truthmaker, *A*. Had *A* not existed, then *p* wouldn't have been true. Likewise, God's true belief can be counterfactually grounded in the existence of that same truthmaker. Had the truthmaker not existed, God wouldn't have believed the proposition in question, because in that case the proposition would have been false. In other words, had *A* not existed, then it would be false that  $\text{God}_k p$ . But this in no way entails that God is caused to believe something

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<sup>52</sup> *Summa Theologiae* Ia.3.6.

that He didn't previously believe. Thus, while God's knowledge is determined by the truthmaker, the determination involved isn't itself causal. An instance of (TMK) can be true with regard to God's beliefs even if the related instance of (CP) is false.

Perhaps an example will help at this point. In her own defense of divine simplicity and eternity, Eleonore Stump illustrates the gap between (TMK) and (CP) via an example of God's knowledge of a woman's prayer to conceive a child: 'God's will is not efficiently caused to be in the state that it is in when God freely wills to cause conception in Hannah because of Hannah's prayer for a child. God can therefore will what he does because of Hannah's prayer without its being the case that his will is acted upon by something outside of himself.'<sup>53</sup> In this example, Hannah's prayer functions as the truthmaker for God's knowledge without it causing God's knowledge. In other words, the doctrine of eternity only commits its proponents to the claim that God's knowledge does not and cannot change over time, since such a being is not *in* time. The doctrine of divine eternity does not, however, commit one to the claim that God's knowledge doesn't depend ontologically on the existence of truthmakers. Thus, (TMK) isn't incompatible with divine eternity. Insofar as the Knowledge Objection requires the incompatibility of (TMK) and divine eternity, the Knowledge Objection fails.

### **THE RESPONSIVENESS OBJECTION AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

The previous section should also go some distance toward indicating where the Responsiveness Objection fails as well. As mentioned above, an agent's responsiveness to another's action requires the agent to have knowledge

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<sup>53</sup> Stump *Aquinas*, 121.

of the action in question and the preceding section shows how God's having such knowledge is compatible with the doctrine of divine eternity. But one might think that more than this is needed. One might think, for example, that an account of divine providence—an account of how God interacts with and controls His creation—is also needed to show that the Responsiveness Objection fails. In other words, one might still wonder how God can be active and responsive to agents' free actions even if one grants that God could have knowledge of those actions.<sup>54</sup> A complete treatment of divine providence in relation to the doctrine of divine eternity is beyond the scope of this paper, partly because of the plethora of available models of divine providence. Nevertheless, in this section let me indicate two notions of providence that will not help in countering the Responsiveness Objection and tentatively sketch one that I think will.

Theological determinism provides the strongest possible notion of divine providence. According to the theological determinism, God determines all events, including all human actions, through His volitions.<sup>55</sup> But the proponent of theological determinism must either reject that there are free human actions or embrace compatibilism, thereby rejecting libertarianism. Insofar as I am attempting to show how divine eternity can be reconciled with God's knowledge of and response to the actions of free agents on the assumption of the truth of libertarianism, this approach to God's providential control cannot be made use of.

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<sup>54</sup> An anonymous referee for this journal raised this objection.

<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Christopher Kirwan defines theological determinism as 'every event and state of the world either is God's act or is brought about by God's act' (*Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989), 117).

The next strongest notion of God's providential control is offered by Molinism. According to Molinism, providence is based on middle knowledge—God's contingent and pre-volitional knowledge of what agents would freely do in various circumstances. The objects of God's middle knowledge are commonly referred to as counterfactuals of creaturely freedom: 'conditionals specifying, for any free creature who might exist and any set of circumstances in which that creature might be placed and left free, what that creature would freely do if placed in those circumstances'.<sup>56</sup> It is God's middle knowledge of such counterfactuals that allows Him to providentially govern His creation despite the truth of libertarianism. Furthermore, while Molinists need not embrace the doctrine of divine eternity, the two doctrines are compatible.<sup>57</sup> The Molinist who also endorses divine eternity could account for God's responsiveness as follows. Recall the earlier example from Stump involving Hannah. If God has middle knowledge, then among the objects of His middle knowledge is the following counterfactual of creaturely freedom:

(CCF): If Hannah were in circumstance C, then she would freely ask God to allow her conceive a child.

Let us assume that (CCF) is true and that as a result of His middle knowledge, God knows that it is true. God could also know, again via His middle knowledge, that as a result of His initial act of creation, that Hannah will be in circumstance

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas Flint 'Providence and predestination' in P. Quinn and C. Taliaferro (eds.) *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 573.

<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, the discussion in Thomas Flint *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), *passim*.

C. Thus, God could respond to Hannah's prayer and cause her to conceive on the basis of the prayer that He timelessly knows she will make.<sup>58</sup>

Yet it isn't clear that the Molinist's response at this point is consistent with the earlier response to the Knowledge Objection. The response to the Knowledge Objection uses the metaphysics of truthmaking to show how God's knowledge of free actions could depend upon those actions without the dependency being a *causal* dependency. But one of the most prominent objections to Molinism, often referred to as 'the Grounding Objection', holds that the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are without truthmakers. Since those counterfactuals that are true are so (logically) prior to any volition on the part of God, He cannot be the truthmaker for them. Additionally, it is hard to see how libertarianism could be preserved if God were the truthmaker for them. Neither can the agents involved in the counterfactuals be their truthmakers.<sup>59</sup> According to Thomas Flint, a contemporary champion of Molinism, 'between God and us free creatures, we have exhausted our list of the usual suspects.... The conclusion that seems forced upon us, then, is that *nobody* actually causes the counterfactuals in question to be true'.<sup>60</sup> In other words, it looks like the Molinist will reject the claim that there are truthmakers for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom such as (CCF). In this case, it is unlikely that the Molinist could then avail herself of the response to the Knowledge Objection given above. Perhaps

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<sup>58</sup> It is for this reason that Molinism allows for God to answer prayers even before they are offered. For a further discussion of this issue, both from the perspective of Molinism and other views in philosophical theology, see my 'Prayers for the past', *Religious Studies*, 41 (2005), 305-332.

<sup>59</sup> For further discussion, see Flint *Divine Providence*, 123ff.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

the Molinist might say that while the objects of God's free knowledge (that is, the knowledge that is logically posterior to God's volition) require truthmakers, the objects of God's middle knowledge do not, thereby accepting a limited version of truthmaking. It is hard to see, however, what would motivate such a view. There thus seems to be a tension between Molinism and an unrestricted acceptance of the metaphysics of truthmaking.

The above discussion of Molinism nevertheless suggests how one might begin to understand providence in a way that is consistent with a metaphysic of truthmaking. As indicated above, the Molinist thinks that God's responsiveness is primarily a function of His middle knowledge. But there is no time at which God comes to have His middle knowledge and God's providential response is not causally dependent on the contents of God's middle knowledge.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the Molinist understands God's providential response as counterfactually dependent upon the contents of His middle knowledge. Had the contents of God's middle knowledge been different, then God would have acted otherwise. For example, if the above counterfactual (CCF) were false, then God would not bring about Hannah's conception as a response to Hannah's freely offered prayer in circumstance C. This is because if (CCF) were false, then Hannah would not freely pray even if she were to be in circumstance C. For this reason, the Molinist thinks that God's responsiveness to the actions of free agents is ultimately rooted in a counterfactual dependency relation.

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<sup>61</sup> This is true whether or not the Molinist embraces the doctrine of divine eternity. If God is eternal, then He neither exists nor has knowledge at a time. On the other hand, if God is everlasting (that is, if He is temporal and exists at all moments of time), then God everlastingly had middle knowledge.

If such a counterfactual dependency relation can provide for God's responsiveness, then a similar line of argument can be used to further the reply to the Responsiveness Objection. In order for God to be responsive to humans, all that is required is that God does something *because* of what a human does. But all that is needed for God to do something *because* of what a human does is for God to have knowledge of what that human is doing and to act on the basis of that knowledge. On this understanding, God is responsive in that had the human agent done otherwise, then God would also have done otherwise. As applied to the example of Hannah and her prayer, we can understand God responding to the prayer as follows: God timelessly knows that Hannah offers a prayer at  $t_1$  to conceive, God timelessly brings it about that Hannah conceives at  $t_2$ , and had Hannah not offered the prayer God would not have timelessly brought about her conceiving. In such a case, God's will is not efficiently caused to be in the state that it is in when God freely wills to cause Hannah to conceive because of Hannah's prayer for a child. Nevertheless, God acts as He does as a result of Hannah's action. God can therefore will what He does because of Hannah's prayer without its being the case that His will is causally acted upon by something outside of Himself

Here we see the same sort of counterfactual dependency that the Molinist appeals to. Divine responsiveness does not require that God's action temporally comes after God's knowledge or that the knowledge changes God; it only requires that God's action is counterfactually dependent on the truthmakers for



the contents of His knowledge of the actions of free agent.<sup>62</sup> And if, as I've argued above, an instance (TMK) can be true with regard to God's knowledge of human actions even if the related instance of (CP) is false, God's responsiveness can also be understood along truthmaking lines via (TMK).<sup>63</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Above, I have tried to show that while divine eternity is incompatible with God being causally affected by anything, it is compatible with God's knowledge being based on things outside of Himself via the metaphysics of truthmaking. The free actions of created agents can be the truthmakers for the objects of God's knowledge without causing a change in God. For this reason, the proponent of divine eternity need not say that God knows the actions of free agents in virtue of causing those actions. For this reason, an eternal God can know the free actions of agents even if libertarianism is true, and the Knowledge Objection fails. Furthermore, since an eternal God is able to do things because of His knowledge, an eternal God can also respond to the free actions of human agents. For this reason, the Responsiveness Objection fails as well.

It should be clear, however, from the above discussion that this attempt to reconcile God's knowledge with His eternity comes at the expense of a contemporary understanding of the doctrine of divine impassibility. According to Richard Creel, the doctrine of divine impassibility is that God 'cannot be affected

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<sup>62</sup> For a similar treatment, though one that does not make explicit use of truthmaker theory, see Stump *Aquinas*, ch. 5.

<sup>63</sup> This section, of course, does not provide a full doctrine of divine providence according to which (i) God is eternal, (ii) libertarianism is true and (iii) Molinism is false. Detailing such an account in full is beyond the scope of this paper. However, for two discussions of divine providence along these lines, see Stump *Aquinas* and David Hunt 'Divine providence and simple foreknowledge', *Faith and Philosophy*, **10** (1993), 394-414.

by an outside force'.<sup>64</sup> If this is how divine impassibility is to be understood, then the present account will be incompatible with such a view of God. On the view outlined above, while God isn't causally affected by anything, He is affected in some sense, since the propositions God knows, and thus God's knowledge as well, are ontologically dependent on the truthmakers for those propositions. Similarly, this view also denies God's 'absolute aseity,' when this is understood as 'the view that God cannot be affected in any way by creatures'.<sup>65</sup> But this should not come as a surprise for a view that attempts to preserve God's knowledge of non-determined free actions, for it is hard to see how God could have such knowledge while being absolutely impassible or possessing absolute aseity. For those that seek to preserve these attributes in the ways defined above, whether or not God is temporal or eternal, it seems that the only available option is theological determinism.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Creel *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11. There is another understanding of divine impassibility as the doctrine that God can't suffer or change; the present account *is* compatible with this latter understanding of impassibility.

<sup>65</sup> Michael D. Robinson *Eternity and Freedom: A Critical Analysis of Divine Timelessness as a Solution to the Foreknowledge/Free Will Debate* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1995), 219.

<sup>66</sup> Tully Borland, Jeff Brower, Eric Manchester, Matthew Mullins, Tim Pawl, Neal Tognazzini, the editor and an anonymous referee for *Religious Studies* provided helpful comments and criticisms on previous versions of this paper. I am also appreciative of the readers of the *Prosblogion* philosophy of religion blog for numerous conversations related to the contents of this paper.