

Omniscience & Future Actions

In 1965, an article by Nelson Pike rekindled a controversy that had remained untouched in many philosophical discussions for centuries. His article, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action”¹ concluded that the Christian concept of divine omniscience removed all possibility of voluntary actions. Fatalism is unavoidable. Though many Christian philosophers responded in opposition, none of their arguments against Pike's conclusion survived critique. With fatalism becoming unavoidable, many free-will theodicies—proofs resolving the existence of evil with the existence of an all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing God—were beginning to fall apart.

Pike says that our problem begins in the Middle Ages when Boethius, in his *Consolatio Philosophiae*, first suggested that no action of human beings is done freely if God is omniscient as omniscience is traditionally defined. Even though this problem can first be seen briefly in Book V of Augustine's *City of God*, it is not until Boethius that it is considered at length. Boethius had concluded that because God exists outside of time, it is impossible for him to know before any action that it would be performed, but Pike concluded rather differently.

In this paper, I shall argue that Pike's analysis and conclusion are correct, but if the definition of omniscience is reexamined, it will be able to deny Pike's incompatibilism. I will begin by detailing the importance of definitions and provide those that are pertinent for this discussion. Next, I will provide an overview and analysis of each of the classical positions in the tension between divine omniscience and free-will. Lastly, I will attempt to provide a viable alternative definition of omniscience, thus causing Pike's argument to fail and defending the compatibility of divine omniscience and free-will.

I

As we begin to look into this problem, another problem, fundamental to answering the first, requires resolution before we can continue; and that second problem is the one of language.

¹ Nelson Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action,” *The Philosophical Review* 74 (1965) pp 27-46.

Because we are dealing specifically with divine omniscience, it would be best to begin with defining God. For our purposes, we shall define God as the absolutely Supreme Being whose role requires having the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, eternity, and limitless free-will². The being known as Yahweh, for our purposes here, will be assumed as the being that holds the role of God absolutely. In defining God, I used the term “absolutely.” This term, if it were to remain undefined, may be a point of criticism; so when I use the term, I shall use it in the sense of something necessarily being the same in all worlds, realities, universes (, etc.), both possible and actual. So, when I refer to God as being the absolutely Supreme Being, I am intending that God is the Supreme Being in all possibilities. There cannot be an instance where God is not the Supreme Being if he is absolute.

As mentioned above, God exists eternally. What exactly does “eternal” imply? There are two popular categories: “atemporalism” and “sempiternalism.” I shall take atemporality to mean existing independent of the dimension of time. Terms relative to time (past, future, etc) are totally meaningless for anything atemporal. In contrast, sempiternal will be used as meaning existence at least within the constraints of the dimension of time. All events are seen as “present”³ from the point of view of an atemporal being. A sempiternal being exists forever, flowing through time in a fashion similar to ours, except that its existence began at some point at least as early as time did and will end at some point at least as late as time does. To compare the two again, a sempiternal being will pass through time and have definite points that are “past” and “future,” while the atemporal being will not have such points. A sempiternal being can begin and cease actions, but the atemporal, from what I can see, must have “always” done an action. There cannot be a beginning or end to anything that is part of a wholly atemporal being.

² There may be other necessary qualities of God, but this list is not meant to be exhaustive.

³ The idea of being always present may be problematic because it implies some temporal relationship, namely the “present”. Unfortunately, this is the best way I believe our language can describe it.

Theologians and philosophers alike claim that just as eternity is a necessary feature of God, so also is omniscience. It seems fair to define omniscience as the ability⁴ to have knowledge of all true things and of only true things. This entails that nothing known by an omniscient can be false and that nothing not known by an omniscient can be true.

Foreknowledge will be defined as the ability to know prior to any action performed by some agent that that particular action would be performed by that agent at that time. In other words, an action X at t1 performed by A is foreknown if being G at some time prior to t1 that A will perform X at t1.

Now that some definitions relating to God have been laid down, it is a good idea to look at actions and will. It seems reasonable to define an action as being voluntary if the being performing said action has the ability or power to do something other than it did. X is a voluntary action only if A possesses the ability to not do X, regardless of whether A actually performs X or not. It seems reasonable to assume that if one has free-will (however that may be defined), one performs at least one action voluntarily. Because of this, fatalism will be defined as the idea that no matter how much one struggles, one is irrevocably and involuntarily compelled from without (i.e. by another, force, etc.) to perform certain actions. This should be distinguished from self-determinism, which is the idea that one is compelled (voluntarily?) from within (i.e. by custom, habit, nature, etc.) to certain actions and thoughts. Free-will, on the other hand, is simply the idea that one acts without any external compulsion. Lastly, there is also something called libertarian free-will, or liberty of indifference, which is the idea that one can, simply by an act of will, act in any way whatsoever, regardless of present motives. No knowledge, no matter how perfect it may be, of one's previous character would enable an

⁴ "Ability" will be discussed further down.

onlooker to decide with certainty the actions the one will pursue.⁵ I believe it is an a priori truth that, by its definition, fatalism must be mutually exclusive of both free-will and liberty of indifference. This liberty of indifference, by its definition, must be mutually exclusive with both self-determinism and fatalism. The only possible place that some kind of determinism can coexist with free-will is the combination of non-libertarian free-will and self-determinism.

One last area needing clarification before proceeding is that of “can” and “cannot.” “Can” and “cannot” are used very vaguely in language. Does one mean that one has the ability to perform an action? Or that one is capable of performing that action? We say God is omnipotent necessarily. God *can* do anything, but we do not imply that God *does* in fact do anything. As the popular children's questions ask, “*Can* God make a rock so big that he cannot lift it?” So, it seems apparent that ability—even that of an omnipotent being—must be limited to the realm of logical possibility. It is impossible for an action performed to be logically contradictory. When we speak of someone being able to perform an action, we generally mean that the one possesses the powers and skills to perform that action. For instance, if I were to say that Jones can eat hot dogs, I imply that Jones has the powers and skills to eat hot dogs. But, I might also imply that Jones has the opportunity and practical knowledge to eat hot dogs as well. If there are no hot dogs within Jones' vicinity, then he cannot eat hot dogs (as there are none to eat!). So, when we speak of ability, we generally assume that the being has the powers, skills, practical knowledge, and opportunity necessary to perform that action.⁶ There is also another aspect of performing an action. It arises when we say that Jones cannot possibly murder his wife. Even if we assume Jones to have the powers, skills, opportunity, and practical knowledge

⁵ Bertrand Russell, “Free-Will Problem from an Idealist Standpoint”, Russell on Metaphysics, (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 29.

⁶ T.V. Morris, “Omnipotence and Omniscience”, Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) pp 58-72.

to murder his wife, it is still possible that Jones *cannot* do such because he is incapable by his character of doing such an action.⁷ So, “can” may imply an capability rather than an ability. The definition of omnipotence⁸ will be understood as the ability to do anything that is logically possible for a being perfect in every respect to do⁹. In order to reduce confusion, I will refrain from using “can” when speaking of actions, divine or otherwise, and use the terms “able” and “capable.”

II

Nelson Pike's argument for the incompatibility between divine omniscience and free-will moves quickly. It begins with Jones having mowed his lawn last Saturday afternoon. Assuming God exists as defined above¹⁰, God knew 80 years prior to last Saturday afternoon that Jones would in fact mow his lawn at that time. From this, Pike argues, it follows that Jones was unable to not mow his lawn. If, in fact, Jones *was* able to not mow his lawn, Pike argues that it brings about a few undesirable options: (a) God would have held false knowledge, which contradicts his omniscience; (b) God would have known differently 80 years ago than what we previously stated, which would mean that Jones changed past events¹¹—a difficult position to defend; (3) God did not exist 80 years ago, which goes against his absolute eternal nature; or (4) Yahweh was not God 80 years ago, which is contrary to the absolute nature of Yahweh being God. Pike then notes that his argument does not hang on the causality of Jones' actions (i.e. fatalism) as they may be caused by something external or internal. I will follow a generalized argument, related by T.V. Morris¹²; it follows as such:

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ This is a highly debatable subject that becomes outside the scope of this essay, so I shall assume for our purposes this one definition.

⁹ Morris, op. cit.

¹⁰ Pike's argument generally assumes that God is sempiternal and not atemporal, yet I will later argue that this is not a necessary feature for the argument to succeed.

¹¹ This goes against what is known as the Fixed Past Constraint: everything existing in the past is unchangeable.

¹² Morris, op. cit.

- (1) If God exists as defined above, God's knowledge is infallible.
- (2) For any event X, if God knows in advance that X will occur, no one has the ability to prevent X.
- (3) For any event X, if no one has the ability to prevent X, then no one performs X voluntarily.
- (4) For every event X that ever occurs, God knows in advance that it will occur.
- Therefore,
- (5) No one distinct from God voluntarily performs any action.
- Therefore,
- (6) Human free-will is a complete illusion.

The first reaction to this argument was that free-will does not entail the actual possibility to not perform the actual action. This is generally referred to as *compatibilism*¹³. The compatibilist will argue that because of this, line (3) in the argument fails, and so, the conclusion becomes escapable¹⁴. Jones need not possess the option to not mow his lawn on that Saturday afternoon for him to have mowed it voluntarily. In fact, because Jones intended to mow his lawn last Saturday, his lack of options is beside the point! This reaction seems very persuasive at first; but, if the circumstances change slightly, we see its downfall. Instead of mowing his lawn, Jones was locked in a room last Saturday. Jones intended to stay in that room all afternoon, so according to the compatibilist, Jones still is free in his actions even though the door is locked. In the end, Jones believed he was free, but in fact, he had no other option. No sane man seeing Jones from outside his room will think Jones is actually free. Jones' free-will is merely an illusion. For Jones, locked in that room, his free-will comes into question for himself only when

¹³ Compatibilism is also used to refer to any argument that reconciles divine omniscience with voluntary action. I will be using it in the narrow sense defined above.

¹⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*

he decided to leave the room and discovers that he is unable to do so. Back in his yard, Jones is free only if he does possess the option to not mow it. His free-will is not hindered as long as he has the option to not mow the lawn (maybe because it is a vacation and he happens to be out of town). The compatibilist is still left with only an illusion of free-will, and so, we are still left with an argument against the compatibility of divine omniscience and free-will.

A second reaction to our problem is influenced by William of Ockham and is, ironically enough, entitled *Ockhamism*. The Ockhamist argues that some facts about the past are not fixed and that Yahweh's being God, in our argument above, 80 years ago just so happen to fall into this category of “soft”¹⁵ facts¹⁶. That is, the Ockhamist attempts to deny the absoluteness of Yahweh being God¹⁷. This makes Yahweh's being God dependent on a human's action, namely Jones'. This would imply that Yahweh's being God is determined by Jones. That would imply that Yahweh does not possess limitless free-will. Therefore, Yahweh cannot be God. This conclusion is unacceptable to both our definition of God and to the theological framework in which this argument is based. Therefore, we are still left with the problem Pike has presented.

The third attempt to diffuse Pike's problem comes from the camp of *Molinism*. This camp, inspired by the works of Luis de Molina, distinguishes between types of knowledge for God: (1) natural knowledge, that is the knowledge God has of all possibilities in the creation prior to his actually creating it; (2) free knowledge—knowledge of what will actually occur in the creation based on which possibilities God chooses to actualize; and (3) middle knowledge, or the knowledge of what things will occur that are contingent on what events actually happen of which he happens to have free knowledge. The Molinist will argue that God's middle knowledge

¹⁵ In contrast, “hard” facts are genuine facts about the past that are unchangeable. The signing of the Declaration of Independence being on 4 July 1776 is one such “hard” fact. A being's knowing that this is true, either prior to or after the event, is a “soft” fact.

¹⁶ John Martin Fischer, “Ockhamism”, *The Philosophical Review* 94, 1 (January 1985) pp 81-100.

¹⁷ Apparently, if this is true, some other being was God prior to Yahweh as both the Ockhamist and I agree on the absoluteness of God's existence.

is not caused by him. In our example, God knows that Jones would mow the lawn last Saturday had it been Saturday afternoon. In other words, God knows how any (and all) free being would act if placed in particular circumstances. This is known commonly as a counterfactual of freedom. God did not cause Jones to be this way; he simply knows it. Furthermore, because God knows that last Saturday was in fact a Saturday afternoon (via his free knowledge), Jones will mow his lawn on that Saturday. God knows this throughout all of eternity. This argument appears to be much stronger than that of the Ockhamist. Because of this, line (2) in the argument fails and, consequently, the conclusion.

But, the game is not over yet. According to the Molinist, these counterfactuals of freedom are caused by the free agent rather than God. But, in fact, the truth of these counterfactuals of freedom is independent of the agent's actions. Going back to Jones, let us assume that Jones will mow his lawn if it is a Saturday afternoon. Now, for the counterfactual of freedom to depend on Jones' actions, it must be shown that

- (A) If Jones were to mow his lawn, it is true that Jones will mow his lawn if it were a Saturday afternoon (i.e. $M > (S > M)$).

This appears very plausible. But, it also must be shown false that

- (B) If Jones were to not mow his lawn, it is true that Jones will mow his lawn if it were a Saturday afternoon (i.e. $\sim M > (S > M)$).

This, at first look would appear false if taken to mean that

- (C) If Jones were to refrain from mowing his lawn on Saturday, it is true that Jones will mow his lawn if it were a Saturday afternoon (i.e. $(S \ \& \ \sim M) > (S > M)$)

But, this not always the case. It could well be the case decided to mow his lawn on Thursday instead of Saturday because he is leaving town for the weekend. That is, if the conditions for

Jones mowing his lawn were met, he would definitely mow his lawn, but Jones' not mowing his lawn does not imply that all the conditions have been met for him to mow the lawn. In other words, Jones' not mowing the lawn does not automatically mean he *refrained* from mowing the lawn under the conditions that, had it been normal, he would have mowed the lawn. It is quite possible that even though Jones was unable to mow the lawn, the natural knowledge God has that Jones will mow his lawn if it is Saturday afternoon still be true. To clarify our examples of (A) and (B),

(A') If Jones does not mow the lawn, it will be because he decided against mowing it

(i.e. $\sim M > (S \ \& \ \sim M)$)

(B') If Jones does not mow the lawn, it will be because it was not Saturday

(i.e. $\sim M > (\sim S \ \& \ \sim M)$)

If (A') is true, (B) must definitely be false, but if (B') is true, then (B) must also be true and, therefore, the counterfactual of freedom would actually be independent of Jones' actions. In a parallel argument, William Hasker¹⁸ shows the absurdity of (A'). In his office, Hasker is hard at work on a poster when he accidentally knocks over his ink bottle and spilling the ink everywhere. Here, he finds himself two parallel counterfactuals:

D) If no ink had been spilled on Hasker's poster, it would have been because Hasker did not knock over his ink bottle ($\sim S > (\sim K \ \& \ \sim S)$)

E) If no ink had been spilled on Hasker's poster, it would have been because Hasker knocked over his ink bottle, but no ink spilled ($\sim S > (K \ \& \ \sim S)$).

Seeing that (E) parallels (A'), we see its absurdity quite readily. This quickly defies the laws of physics (not to mention Murphy's Law). (D) remains as a plausible solution, resulting in (B') being true, and therefore, the counterfactuals of freedom being independent of the agent's

¹⁸ William Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge" *Noûs* 20 (1986) pp 545-557.

actions. So therefore, Jones is not acting voluntarily. The conclusion still remains that human free-will is a complete illusion if God's omniscience entails foreknowledge.

The most recent of the “classic” reactions arose in the very end of the 1970s out of the works of Anthony Kenny, who based his response on Duns Scotus' work, and will be, naturally enough, referred to as *Scotism*. Scotism attacks the argument (as it is outlined above) at line (2). The Scotist holds that the Transfer Principle¹⁹ is false. Namely, that it is not the case that Jones' ability to refrain from mowing his lawn (which, hypothetically, he does) would also be bringing it about that God knew falsely 80 years ago. As Fischer points out, for the Transfer Principle to be demonstrated false, an example must be shown to have the following features: “it must be a case where (i) an agent can (cannot) perform some act X, (ii) in the circumstances, doing X would be doing Y, and (iii) the agent cannot (can) perform Y”²⁰. The best example²¹ from the Scotist camp comes from Kenny himself:

*I may be able to hit the dartboard; on this particular occasion, I may hit the dartboard by hitting the center of the bull; but it by no means follow that I am capable of hitting the center of the bull.*²²

Clearly, the first two features of the example against the Transfer Principle are shown (I can hit the dartboard; in the circumstances, hitting the dartboard is hitting the bullseye), but it is not as obvious if the last is (I cannot hit the bullseye). Unfortunately, being in the circumstances, I did just hit the bullseye contrary to (iii), I must be able to hit it—no matter how rarely that may be. It may be the case that, in general, I lack the skills necessary to hit the bullseye consistently, but this does not reduce my *ability* to hit it down to zero. Therefore, it does in fact follow that my

¹⁹ At its basic, the Transfer Principle is that because S can do X and doing X would be doing Y, S can do Y.

²⁰ John Martin Fischer, "Scotism," *Mind* (April 1985), 94(374):231-243.

²¹ For other examples, see John Martin Fischer's "Scotism" and Anthony Kenny's *Will, Freedom, and Power*.

²² Anthony Kenny, *Will, Freedom, and Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975) p. 156.

hitting the bullseye implies my being able to hit the bullseye. Kenny's example against the Transfer Principle fails, and therefore, so do his attack on Pike's argument.

The final response to the argument comes from Boethius, who, as I mentioned above, first formulated the problem. His reaction attacks the problem in the way it defines God's eternity. Here, we have been assuming all along that God exists sempiternally—that is, within time—but, Boethius claims that the more accurate definition would be God existing *outside* of time; hence, this reaction is called *Atemporal Eternalism*. Because God exists outside of time, it is impossible for God to know what events would occur prior to their occurrence (i.e. “fore”know) because God does not exist in time. Here, because God does not have prior knowledge of whether an event will occur or not, line (4) in our argument is false. The argument's validity becomes a thing of the past and Jones' actions were voluntary, after all. Yet again, it appears that Pike's problem wasn't much more than a simple nuisance. But, here's the eternalist's falling: God must know everything from eternity equally and acts on things in time from eternity equally. This seems to me to be true because the Christian theologian will accept that God has effected at least one event set in time, namely creation; and because God's actions cannot be instantaneous, they must have been willed from eternity to occur at the times they are enacted. So, with that given, it is quite plausible that God willed from eternity that Smith would receive ten years ago a revelation from God which included within it the information that Jones would mow his lawn this past Saturday. Because God's knowledge is infallible, so must Smith's revelation be infallible. Because of this infallible revelation from God, Jones becomes once again unable to refrain from mowing his lawn. Now, lines (2) and (4) in our argument can be modified only slightly to be generalized enough to include knowledge from eternity as well as in advance:

(2') For any event X, if God knows either in advance or from eternity that X will occur, no one has the ability to prevent X.

(4') For every event X that ever occurs, God knows either in advance or from eternity that it will occur.

Now, the argument still holds water and the eternalist is still left without an adequate response.

Now, it is important to note as T.V. Morris does that

Whether God happens to reveal his eternal beliefs about our temporal actions or whether he keeps them to himself should not alone make any difference in whether we are free or not. It is not at all clear that, or how it could be the case that, it would be the act or fact of revelation itself that would act as a constraint.²³

Because God is able to have revealed to Smith ten years ago that Jones would mow his lawn on that Saturday, it must be true that God eternally knew at a time before last Saturday that Jones would mow the lawn. This is still sufficient for the argument to succeed in denying human free-will in the presence of a divine omniscience as we have been defining it. It is impossible for God to exist atemporally with omniscience as defined above and free-will to exist. All of our “classic” responses have failed to both reconcile divine omniscience with human free-will and remain within plausible limits of Christian theology.²⁴

III

Before jumping to the final reactions which I believe are the only ones that do reconcile divine omniscience and human free-will without sacrificing any quality of God that would move the reaction outside Christian theology, I will first present a strengthened argument of Pike's. In Fisher's article “Scotism,” he presents a reformulation of Pike's original argument that no longer

²³ Morris, op. cit.

²⁴ Ockhamism did the former, but failed the latter.

rests on the Transfer Principle. The strengthened argument²⁵ begins with making explicit the fixity of the past:

(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 will again suppose that God exists as defined above and that Jones performs some ordinary²⁶ act X at t2. Because of this, God knew at some time t1 before t2 that Jones will perform X at t2. Now, assuming that Jones performs X voluntarily, the following would be true:

(1') If Jones were to refrain from doing X at t2, then God would have known falsely at t1.

This surely must be false as God is unable to know falsely. Because (1') must be false, one of the following conditionals must be true to maintain divine omniscience and free-will:

(2') If Jones were to refrain from doing X at t2, then God would have known differently that what He actually knew at t1, or

(3'a) If Jones were to refrain from doing X at t2, God would not have existed at t1.

(3'b) If Jones were to refrain from doing X at t2, the person existing as God at t2 would not have been God at t1.

Because of (FP), (2') would make Jones' ability to refrain from doing X at t2 an impossibility. Similarly, (3'a) would also make Jones unable to refrain from doing X at t2. (3'b) would also be impossible because of the now explicit (FP). Hence, we are left with the conclusion that if God exists as defined above, Jones cannot do other than what he actually does at t2. Of course, this is easily generalized to include any human action.

The last place Pike's argument can be directly attacked is at the definition of omniscience.

²⁵ Fischer, "Scotism"

²⁶ It is important to note that the act performed is ordinary. In fact, it must be one ordinary enough so that most are able to perform it. Otherwise, the argument can be made that the act being performed is not logically possible.

Some recent philosophers believe that omniscience does not entail complete foreknowledge²⁷. Omniscience, just like omnipotence has restraints on it because otherwise it would be confusion. Christian theologians and philosophers agree that omnipotence cannot entail the ability to do acts that perfect beings are incapable of doing, such as sinning. For example, it is impossible for God to sin and remain sinless. Their agreement, though, seems to falter on omniscience. They generally believe that a God with omniscience limited to logical possibilities would make that being less than God. To the contrary, a God without logical limitations to its omniscience would be chaotic at best. Going from the assumption that God has given man the will to voluntarily make at least one choice—namely, that of believing in God²⁸ or not, whatever it may entail—it must be the case that man has free-will in respect to at least one action. Because this action is considered fundamental to the innermost being of the person that is influenced by the actions and decisions of that person's entire life, it would be unfair, at best, for the person's life to be fatalistically determined as then the outcome of the person's “ultimate choice” would be determined by those already determined actions. The person would not, in fact, have free-will in respect to that one action. Therefore, it must be the case that God has given free-will to people in respect to all of their actions and decisions.

Divine omniscience has been traditionally defined above, as entailing foreknowledge²⁹ of all actions of all beings, including ones with free-will. This has become more and more of a controversy amongst philosophers. If the future actions of beings with free-will were to not be knowable, then we have almost completely avoided Pike's argument as line (4) becomes an invalid assumption. The main argument levied against this view is that some believe that this

²⁷ It may be the case that God has *some* foreknowledge, but it is definitely the case that God does not have all foreknowledge.

²⁸ This may not be the most accurate representation of this choice, but the exact choice to be made is immaterial to this discussion.

²⁹ Or knowledge from eternity

limits God's omniscience to the point of making God not God. But, that is not the case.

Assuming that the future actions of free-willed beings are unknowable, does that entail God's omniscience being limited to the point of God losing his quality of essential omniscience? No, it would be more accurate to suggest that God loses his quality of infallible foreknowledge.

Omniscience, as defined above, was the ability to have knowledge of all true things and only true things. God still knows everything that is knowable—namely everything past and present—and he knows all true, knowable things and only true, knowable things. No bit of omniscience is destroyed, but rather only infallible foreknowledge. With this infallible knowledge of knowable things—namely those things present and past—it may be the case that God can *predict* very accurately future actions, but his being mistaken on something unknowable could not be used to argue that his omniscience, as redefined here, was insufficient. To put it another way, the future is nothing more than a realm of possibilities waiting to be actualized. With his perfect knowledge of knowable things, he knows all possibilities of the future (as the Molinist claims), but he does not know which possibilities will be actualized. As T.V. Morris says, “He knows present dispositions, proclivities, inclinations, intentions, and probabilities as well as they can be known. But in a world which is not deterministic, in a world peopled by free beings, this does not give him the whole future story of creation.”³⁰ Before presentism is completed though, we must first look at a very similar argument that may be more plausible to the Christian thinker.

The final reaction that can be made against Pike's incompatibilism that I believe to be the most plausible I will call *self-limited omniscience*. Much like presentism above, it argues that divine omniscience or foreknowledge must be limited in some respect so that human free-will is able to co-exist with it. Its point of departure is how divine omniscience is limited.

Rather than stating that future actions of sufficiently free-willed beings are unknowable, self-

³⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*

limited omniscience states that God himself limits his omniscience. Because God believes that the choice to believe in him must be made freely, God makes himself incapable of knowing future actions—even from eternity. If God were to know the future actions of people to whom he had given free-will, he would immediately violate and revoke such freedom and cause the choice to not be made freely. But, this choice is so crucial to God, he remains incapable of foreknowing it, even though his *ability* is not restrained at all. To rephrase the argument, we shall assume that God is consistent for all eternity. Because he has given people free-will, he must maintain that choice for all eternity in order to remain consistent. If he were to remove that free-will by not limiting his foreknowledge, he would remove that free-will and violate his consistency. He is incapable of knowing the future actions of beings to whom he has given free-will.

The biggest blow to the self-limitist, though, is the same one that is plaguing presentism: if God exists atemporally, God would be incapable of any knowledge of any action. The only hope for both the self-limitist and the presentist is to show that God cannot exist solely atemporally. It need not be argued that God does not exist atemporally at all, but just shown that it cannot be the only actuality³¹. If God were to exist atemporally, he would be unable to act on temporal things without having decreed from eternity everything. This would still lead us to the eternalist's problems. But, I will show that it is not logically plausible for God to exist atemporally. Because God's atemporality would negate the possibility of human free-will, which hypothetically exists, it would be logical to imply that God is incapable of existing atemporally in the same manner that the presentist argued that God is incapable of knowing future actions of free-willed beings. God's being atemporal would devastate his plan for a voluntary choice of

³¹ It may be possible to argue that God exists both atemporally and sempiternally, but that argument is beyond this essay

belief. This would cause God to become inconsistent with himself and, eventually, lead to God being imperfect. That is an unacceptable conclusion to the Christian thinker³². Therefore, God is incapable of existing atemporally.

With this new development, it can be easily applied to the self-limitist who maintained this line of thinking all along. It may as well be applicable to the presentist's argument, thus leaving two possibilities that sufficiently remove the incompatibility of divine omniscience and human free-will. But, as it can be seen quite obviously, the self-limitist's line of reasoning may be preferred to the traditional Christian thinker, whereas the presentist's reasoning redefines a quality of God which most Christian thinkers shy from doing.

IV

Pike's argument against the compatibility of divine omniscience and human free-will has been a hotbed of discussion, debate, and criticism for the past forty or so years. Jumping from Boethius' idea that if God is omniscient, man cannot have free-will, Pike developed a formalized argument that shared in Boethius' conceptualization, but taking it to the point by also asserting that God is omniscience by virtue of his being. This made the implication on free-will not only theoretical, but asserted and supported by a well formed argument.

Boethius' response of atemporal eternalism was the first attempt to deny this implication, but it only strengthened the conclusion. For God to exist atemporally, there is no possible way to logically assert that he does not also know all actions a being will perform. The compatibilist's response asserted that free-will does not necessitate actual, viable choices, only the illusion of them. One only needs to think he has free-will when making his decisions even if his decisions aren't made voluntarily. But, as this is quickly seen, there is no actual free-will and the denial

³² Some other theo-philosophical groups may not have as much of a problem with this idea.

ends up not actually addressing Pike's argument. Ockhamists will step up to bat next and assert that God needn't *always* be God; and, as it just so happens, any action performed that God did not correctly know would only imply that God was not God when he believed other than what actually happened. As this is also obvious, the Ockhamist is thinking well outside the bounds of Christian thought, of which Pike's problem is addressing. Ockhamism has a long list of difficulties to explain before returning to the realm of the plausible Christian thought. The idea of middle knowledge offered by Molinism at face value seems like a very attractive resolution to Pike's argument. Unfortunately, as I have shown above, Molinism carried out beyond its immediate beauty reveals that human preferences are independent of actual events and outside the control of the person. This leaves the person still without human free-will. Anthony Kenny attempts his reconciliation by claiming that a being's actions once actualized does not entail that God knew falsely, even if God's knowledge was different from that of the action. But, as John Martin Fischer has shown us, Pike's argument can be modified to make Kenny's argument inconsequential to the problem, even if it were to be correct.

Presentism is the first argument against Pike's that has viability. In its simplicity, it asserts that the future actions of beings with sufficient free-will are inherently unknowable. It successfully withstands Pike's argument as God no longer knows in advance unknowable actions. God's omniscience is limited to logical possibility, just as it had been argued that omnipotence is limited to logical possibility. Presentism's weakness comes in the form of atemporality and the necessity of sufficient free-will. I have shown that the atemporality is contradictory to the Christian concept of free-will as it is believed that free-will is necessary and made necessary by God. Presentism's other weakness, the amount of free-will required to be sufficient, lies outside the aim of this essay, but it is a topic worth investigating. The other

argument against Pike's that I believe to be even more viable than presentism is what I have called self-limited omniscience. Here, it is asserted that God is perfectly able to know all future actions, but he is also incapable of doing such as it removes the very thing that God has deemed necessary: human free-will.

The implications of self-limited omniscience, if it can stand the tests of criticism and time, may be one that allows the resolution of the problem of evil in philosophy, as well as theological issues such as scriptural interpretation. Because this argument does not *remove* any properties of the divine, it may be the one most plausible to a Christian philosopher or theologian, as well as offer a logical and plausible response to Pike's incompatibilism. In this paper, I have argued just this; and I have placed this argument against the test of Pike's and have argued that it has sufficiently resolved the problem of divine omniscience and human free-will. I hope that over time, this argument will stand criticism of other perspectives as well as become more firmly rooted in philosophy as it seems to provide the most hope for a Christian thinker in discussion the philosophy of religion from a Christian viewpoint.