

Revisiting Kretzmann's Argument that an Immutable God Can't Know Mutable Reality

ENRIC F. GEL

Ateneu Universitari Sant Pacià

enricfgel@gmail.com

PATRICK FLYNN

GCAS College of Dublin

patrick.flynn@gcas.ie

Abstract: In this paper, we revisit Norman Kretzmann's argument that an immutable God can't always know what time it is. We uncover two implicit premises that, we argue, theists can simply reject once their incompatibility with their theistic commitments is made apparent. These suppositions are (i) internalism about beliefs and (ii) content essentialism. We end by considering further whether these two theses are, in fact, in conflict between themselves. If true, this would make Kretzmann's argument dialectically unstable.

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1. Kretzmann's Argument Against an Immutable Omniscient God

In his widely debated 1966 paper, "Omniscience and Immutability", Norman Kretzmann argued that these two traditional divine attributes are in stark conflict between each other, once temporal change is assumed to be a real feature of reality. Indeed, for God to be omniscient, so the argument goes, God must always know what time it is. But to keep track of time in this way entails that God changes accordingly, first believing that it is now t_1 , later believing that it is now t_2 . Hence, either immutability precludes omniscience (with God being unable to know what time it is now) or omniscience precludes immutability (with God being subject to change).

Here is the argument in its syllogistic form:

- (1) A perfect being is not subject to change (i.e., immutability).
- (2) A perfect being knows everything (i.e., omniscience).
- (3) A being that knows everything always knows what time it is.
- (4) A being that always knows what time it is is subject to change.
- (5) A perfect being is subject to change.

- (6) A perfect being is not a perfect being.
- (7) There is no perfect being (*reductio*).

Responses to Kretzmann's argument are many and varied.¹ Some theists are inclined to denying premise (1), abandoning, hence, immutability.² Others may want to deny or qualify omniscience (premises 2 and 3). And the conclusion could also be averted by embracing a B-Theory of time, where there is, in fact, no changing *now* that an omniscient God should be keeping track of (making premise 4 false).³

In this paper, we want to present a response to this argument that seems to have been overlooked in the literature. The response dives deep into Kretzmann's justification for premise (4) and finds two unstated premises that the theist can simply reject once their incompatibility with the existence of an immutable omniscient God is made apparent. We don't claim this is the only solution to Kretzmann's challenge, nor necessarily the best one. We simply consider it as a live underexplored option, which is why we are eager to see it get more attention and discussion. Diving into this response will also uncover a potential inconsistency within Kretzmann's argument that threatens to make its whole reasoning moot. Before going into that, though, we need to establish some preliminary thoughts.

2. Before we begin . . .

. . . we have a nitpicky complaint. We are not very comfortable with talking about God's *beliefs*, *mental states* or the like, though we will mostly accommodate to this kind of language because that is how the original argument was framed. In reality, we think this terminology invites too much anthropomorphism in our discourse about God.⁴ In our preferred model of God (classical theism, which we are not going to try to defend), God is an absolutely simple and foundational reality, bereft of any composition whatsoever.⁵ Thus, *we* might know things by forming *beliefs*, understood as some kind of internal mental states distinct both

¹ Kretzmann himself later argued the argument fails in Stump and Kretzmann (1981). For two useful guides to several of these responses, see Pawl (2009) and Leftow (2016).

² For instance, Moreland and Craig (2003, 526–527).

³ Sure, as Kretzmann notes, “this interpretation preserves the immutability of a perfect being by imposing immutability on everything else, and that is surely an inconceivably high price to pay, in the view of Christians and non-Christians alike” (Kretzmann 1966, 416). And still, independently from this discussion, many Christians and non-Christians alike have felt the need to pay said price, confronted with the arguments for a B-Theory of time.

⁴ For a more developed treatment of this point, see Alston (1986).

⁵ For recent work on classical theism, see Fuqua and Koons (2022).

from me and from each other. But if God knows, the divine mode of knowing must be relevantly (in fact, radically) different from our own.

Firstly, given simplicity, *that by which* God knows is simply God Himself, and not some internal "item" produced, sustained by, or attached to the divine essence, really distinct from it. In this sense, we think God is identical with his own knowledge,⁶ meaning that He is his own act of knowledge (his own belief, if you insist —He is *that by which* he knows). In this same vein, while we may know reality by forming propositions "in our head", God's knowledge is most certainly non-propositional, direct, and unmediated, more akin to knowledge through acquaintance or direct experience. Still, this analogy has its limits, since God does not know reality by being somehow causally affected by it, as a passive observer. On the contrary, God's knowledge is executive: by perfectly understanding Himself, God perfectly knows the reach of his causal operation (in an analogous way as how we know we are moving an arm or intending to move an arm). Hence, God knows contingent reality because He Himself is intentionally bringing it about.

From this it follows that, when it comes to the divine mode of knowing, there is only *one* intrinsically immutable, absolutely simple, and transworld identical act of knowledge in God, by which he knows in an unmediated and direct way first Himself, and through Himself, everything else which he is making to be. This may all sound strange and mysterious, indeed, but strange and mysterious things are sometimes true (or else philosophers and quantum physicists are pretending all the time).

The radical otherness of God's knowledge has often been part of the classical theist's response to Kretzmann's challenge. Thomas D. Sullivan, for instance, once wrote:

The important thing to note for our present purposes is that to say the divine mind does not compose or divide is thus to say something not only about the way the divine mind *acts* but also about the way reality is presented to the divine mind — *the object of the act*. In a more contemporary idiom, we may say that God's knowledge is nonpropositional, i.e., God does not form propositions to understand the world. And if God knows everything without forming propositions, then there is something wrong with the challenge to state in propositional form just what God represents to himself of temporal events. (Sullivan 1991, 25–26)

⁶ As Pawl and Grant (2023, 142) explain, the expression "God's knowledge" can be understood in at least two senses: first, as a shorthand for predications of the form *God knows X*, and second, as some positive ontological item within God. When we say that God is identical to his own knowledge, we don't mean it in the predicative sense, but in the ontological sense: God is identical to *that by which* he knows.

We think this is a step in the right direction. However, we are not convinced that simply pointing to the radical otherness of God's knowledge will be enough to avert Kretzmann's argument. Or to put it differently, more can be said than just that, in our opinion. Even if God knows non-propositionally, the argument would claim God can't always know what time it is through an immutable act of knowledge. An immutable act of knowledge can't keep track of a mutable reality, regardless of whether it presents such reality to the knower through a forming of propositions or not. If God is to always know what time it is, He must first know, non-propositionally or otherwise, that it is now 8:15, and later know something different, such as that it is now 8:16. And *this* change in knowledge will entail a change in the knower (in his act or acts of knowledge), no matter how different such a knower is from us, petty mortals.

Having gotten this out of our chests, it is now time to explore Kretzmann's justification for premise 4.

3. Our undercutting of premise 4

Premise (4) states that "always knowing what time it is entails incessant change in the knower" (Kretzmann 1966, 414). But how does this follow? It is important to note that Kretzmann is not arguing that a mere change *in knowledge* entails a change in the knower. In fact, one can produce a change in a knower's knowledge without changing anything in the knower himself. This is because knowledge, being related to truth, is an extrinsic property —something that depends or is grounded, at least partially, upon features that are not intrinsic to the knower.⁷

Here is an example to see the point: I (Enric) know there is a cup of coffee cooling down in my kitchen (I have just prepared it myself; philosophy is hard). But if this is the case, my 5-year-old daughter can go and pour it all over the sink. Then, I will no longer *know* there is a cup of coffee in my kitchen, for I can't know something that is false. But in this example, I have undergone a change in knowledge, from *knowing p* to *not-knowing p*, without undergoing any intrinsic change whatsoever. Nothing in me has changed (most notably, my sleepiness), and still, I have ceased to know something I knew. Hence, a mere change in knowledge does not suffice for establishing an intrinsic change in the knower,

⁷ As many others (Brower 2009, 124n1; Grant 2012, 254), we understand intrinsic and extrinsic properties following David Lewis: "We distinguish intrinsic properties, which things have in virtue of the way they themselves are, from extrinsic properties, which they have in virtue of relations or lack of relations to other things" (Lewis 1986, 61). Though whole papers have been written on this distinction, we think this is intuitive enough to move on.

and it is such an intrinsic change that the argument needs to counter immutability.⁸

Now, Kretzmann's point is that a change of knowledge *of the type* of that involved in always knowing what time it is *will* imply a change in the knower. Why so? Because, Kretzmann argues, such a change necessarily entails a change in the knower's *beliefs*. The problem for immutability, thus, comes not from a mere change in knowledge, but from the "change in beliefs entailed by knowing the changing of anything" (Kretzmann 1966: 412); in our case, the passage of time. For God to know that it is now 8:15, and a minute later, that it is now 8:16, his *beliefs* about what time it is must change —he must first have the belief that it is 8:15, and a minute later, the belief that it is 8:16. And it is *this* change in beliefs that is taken to be incompatible with immutability, for beliefs are assumed to be an intrinsic "something" within the knower. If an intrinsic "something" within the knower changes, or one intrinsic "something" ceases to exist and another one takes its place, then the knower himself is subject to change, and thus, he is not immutable.

Kretzmann does not formalize this reasoning behind premise 4, but if one had to, these are the premises we think should be identified:

- (8) A being that knows that it is now t_n believes that it is now t_n .
- (9) Beliefs have their contents essentially.
- (10) The belief that it is now t_n is different from the belief that it is now t_{n+1} (from 9).
- (11) A being that always knows what time it is is subject to a change of beliefs (8, 10).
- (12) Beliefs are wholly intrinsic to the knower.
- (13) A being that always knows what time it is is subject to (intrinsic) change (11, 12).

⁸ Another stock example of an extrinsic change (sometimes also labelled a "Cambridge change") is Socrates going from being taller than Plato to being shorter than Plato. Such a change can occur without any intrinsic variation in Socrates: Socrates, in fact, can remain the same, while the change is all on the side of Plato's height. Another one: imagine that you were the only thing in existence and consider the property you would then have of being alone. Now suppose that Steven the frog comes into being uncaused out of nothing, right there next to you. In this example, you would have undergone some kind of change, from being alone to not being alone. Still, *ex hypothesi*, nothing intrinsic to you would be different. Hence, we call this an extrinsic or Cambridge change to distinguish it from genuine (aka., intrinsic) change.

Premise 8 follows from a basic understanding of knowledge, which at least must presuppose belief and truth (let's not invite Gettier to the party).⁹ Premise 9 is a thesis which has been called *content essentialism*. 10 follows from 9 once it is seen that the belief that it is now t_n has a different content (namely, that it is now t_n) than the belief that it is now t_{n+1} . 11 follows from 8 and 10, generalizing to a being that always knows what time it is. 12 simply states the intrinsicity of beliefs: that what belief a given being has is determined by factors wholly intrinsic to the being in question. And finally, 13 follows straightly from 11 and 12, and is Kretzmann's premise 4.

Now, what we want to claim is that the value in Kretzmann's argument is that it brings to light that this whole set of premises (1–12) is inconsistent. Put in another way, what the argument manages to uncover is an incompatibility *not* within theism or classical theism *per se*, but between the belief in an omniscient and immutable God and the rest of the argument's assumptions. But if this is so, granting that the theist has perfectly legitimate reasons to justifiably believe in an omniscient and immutable God, nothing necessarily precludes him from denying any of the other premises in the argument. After all, precisely *per* Kretzmann's argument, the theist will realize (if he hadn't done so already) that his theory logically entails the falsehood of some of these assumptions, and hence he'll just deny the least expensive one.

And what we propose is that the theist deny either content essentialism (premise 9) or the intrinsicity of beliefs (premise 12). To start with the latter, there is already a strong literature on the extrinsicity of beliefs, exploring the idea that the fact of what belief I am in is determined, in part, by factors that are external to my own constitution.¹⁰ Causal theories of meaning, for instance, maintain that beliefs have their content (their *aboutness* or meaning) in virtue of some causal connection between the internal state in question and the represented reality. For instance, my belief that mosquitoes are annoying is about mosquitoes because mosquitoes have played a certain causal role in the coming about of that internal feature in me that represents them (be it a certain mental state, or brain configuration, or what have you). But if some externalist theory of beliefs is true, then you could, at least in principle, produce a change in my beliefs without altering anything *in* me, intrinsic to me. Maintain everything intrinsic to me the same, but counterfactually erase mosquitoes from History (please) — I will not be in the belief that mosquitoes are annoying. Maintain everything intrinsic to me the same, but counterfactually replace each mosquito in the past for a fly

⁹ Though, to recall our worries in Section 2, the classical theist could replace “belief” with “act of knowledge”. The argument should then claim that, to keep track of what time it is, the knower's intrinsic acts of knowledge must be changing accordingly.

¹⁰ See Rowlands, Lau and Deutsch (2020) for a general overview of the standard externalist positions and arguments.

—I will be in intrinsically the same mental state (or brain configuration, etc.), but it will have a different content (that flies are annoying), and hence, assuming beliefs have their content essentially,¹¹ I'll have a different belief.

What is important about this is that, by denying internalism about beliefs, the theist averts Kretzmann's conclusion. For now, just as a mere change in knowledge does not entail an intrinsic change in the knower, a mere change in belief will likewise not entail *per se* an intrinsic change in the believer. And hence, God's beliefs (and knowledge) about what time it is could be constantly changing, keeping track of the clock, so to speak, while everything intrinsic to God remained immutably the same. If beliefs are individuated by external factors (as externalism claims), maybe what determines that God's beliefs about what time it is change is simply the changing fact of what time it is, and not anything mutable *within* God Himself. And if externalism is too radical a view, or not sufficiently supported by the standard arguments, it seems to us that theists are within their rights to limit externalism only to God, *precisely in light of* Kretzmann's argument. Kretzmann argument proves to the theist that something like externalism must be true of God's beliefs or mode of knowing, whether or not it is true of *us*. God's radical otherness would then come into play to ground and make sense of this distinction between divine and human knowledge.¹²

The second option we see open for the theist is to deny premise (9), content essentialism (from now on, CE). This is a less transited path, admittedly, but why shouldn't the theist explore it? To reiterate, if Kretzmann's argument is valid, and assuming for the moment the intrinsicality of beliefs or acts of knowing, its lesson is that traditional theism logically entails the falsehood of content essentialism.¹³ Hence, if the theist sees his theory sufficiently rationally supported on independent grounds, and also understands that it entails the falsity of CE, what are the stronger reasons that should force him to abandon his whole worldview, instead of simply CE? We know of no such reasons. When we have discussed this

¹¹ This assumption will be important later.

¹² For a discussion of extrinsic models of divine knowledge, see for instance Grant (2012). Recently, an interesting challenge to such proposals has come from inquiring about the status of God's knowledge in that possible world where God exists alone. See Schmid and Mullins (2022), and for a (to our lights, successful) response, Pawl and Grant (2023).

¹³ As we will argue later, this seems even more clear for those theists that affirm God's simplicity and transworld identity. If (i) God's act of knowing is an intrinsic something within God, (ii) God is intrinsically the same across all possible worlds and (iii) what God knows varies from world to world, then it simply follows that there is at least one act of knowledge (God's act of knowledge) that does not have its content essentially. In this sense, denying CE as a solution to Kretzmann's argument is even better than embracing some kind of B-theory of time. For suppose the theist rejects the objective reality of the passage of time to avoid Kretzmann's conclusion. That won't solve the problem of God's contingent knowledge, and hence the theist will have to come up with yet *another* different solution for this other issue. But denying CE, the theist avoids both difficulties in one same move.

with other people, we have received many “CE is just obvious”, “Denying CE is weird”, and “Please leave me alone”, but no non-question-begging argument for CE. And plausibly, any argument for CE will be based on some other premise which the theist will simply reject once its incompatibility with theism is made apparent.

Some may want to argue for CE from our practices of thought individuation. Indeed, as John Gibbons has pointed out, “[t]he standard, or most common way, of referring to a token thought is to refer to the person to whom it occurs and the time and the content of the event” (Gibbons 1993, 63). Hence, “thought x and thought y are the same (token) thought just in case x and y occur to the same person at the same time and have the same content” (Gibbons 1993, 64). However, as Gibbons himself rightly points out,

[W]e can’t get essentialism from a criterion of identity. Suppose that we individuate objects in the following way: x and y are the same physical object just in case they are in the same place at the same time. We do not infer from this that physical objects have their places essentially. (Gibbons 1993, 64)¹⁴

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that, even apart from theological considerations, other influential philosophical theories might also be implicitly committed to denying CE. Indeed, as Marian David has written:

Take the view known as token physicalism [. . .] On one version it holds that every mental state (token) is some brain state (token) or other. Brain states are assumed to be physical (electro-chemical) configurations of the brain. Isn’t this sort of view pretty much committed to rejecting the idea that belief states have their contents essentially? After all: How could an electro-chemical configuration of the brain, or any physical state for that matter, have propositional content essentially? It’s already difficult to see how such a thing could have propositional content at all, but *essentially*? (David 2002, 106)¹⁵

¹⁴ To get to CE, Gibbons continues, one should assume a cross-world criterion of identity for thoughts —such that, if x and y are thoughts, then x in W1 is y in W2 if and only if x and y occur to the same person at the same time and have the same content. However, it is not at all clear that such a criterion of identity for thoughts is at all implied by our ordinary practices of thought individuation. And, in any case, such a criterion would entail not only CE, but also subject and temporal essentialism, which seem clearly wrong (it seems that the very same token thought that ice creams are bad for my health could have occurred to me when it was not already too late). See (Gibbons 1993, 64).

¹⁵ At the end of his paper, David briefly problematizes CE for dualists too: “[L]et’s say immaterial states are made from immaterial soul stuff. So token belief-states are soul-stuff states, and soul-stuff states are essentially soul-stuff states [. . .] Why in the world should anything that’s essentially soul stuff have propositional content essentially? Consider an example. According to Descartes, when you believe that there is a cow grazing in the meadow, you are inwardly saying ‘yes’ to an immaterial idea that represents a cow grazing in the meadow. Why,

To press the matter even further, token physicalism appears to be in conflict with CE when confronted with standard externalist arguments (a general point about externalism and CE to which we will return later on). Recall Burge's (1979) arthritis thought experiment, where Larry falsely believes (and utters) that "I have arthritis in the thigh", while physically identical counterfactual Larry, uttering exactly the same sounds, expresses a different mental content because of differences between Larry and counterfactual Larry's linguistic communities (in the counterfactual scenario, "arthritis" applies also to ailments in the thigh). If, as token physicalism claims, a given belief token just is some physical particular item within a believing subject, *and* Larry and counterfactual Larry are indeed physically identical, then it seems straightforward that CE must go.¹⁶

Thus, it simply won't do to insist to the theist that CE is just plainly obvious or rationally unavoidable, for there are already respectable philosophical positions that apparently clash with CE. If the theist must deny CE, it seems likely he is not alone. Additionally, if denying CE is deemed "too much" (by some unknown to us standard, anyway), the theist need not deny it in any absolute or universal way. A comfortable middle position could be to affirm CE as true of any creature's knowledge, and simply deny it when applied to God. Here is where the radical otherness of God could come into play once more: that CE is true of creatures but not of God would not be an arbitrary whim, but something made true because God is a purely actual knower, that knows without intrinsically going from potency to act. And now, while it may be obvious or intuitive that CE is true for knowers like us, in need of actualization, we have no intuition on whether CE is necessarily and universally true for all possible knowers, including purely actual ones.

Denying CE, coupled with the extrinsicality of knowledge, provides a way out of Kretzmann's argument: God's knowledge of mutable facts such as what time it is changes because such facts change, but no intrinsic change in God is required or entailed by this. If beliefs or acts of knowledge don't have their content essentially, God's beliefs or act of knowledge can remain immutably intrinsically the same while its content varies. And so, divine knowledge of the passage of time does not clash with immutability: God knows changing things through an

one might ask, would any idea, be it as immaterial as you want, essentially represent what it represents? Why couldn't that very same immaterial idea have represented flies sitting on the wall" (David 2002, 113–114). Another position that might have to deny CE seems to be functionalism, as Zemach and Widerker (1987, 25–26) have suggested. Indeed, if the mental content of a certain something is given to it entirely by the function or role it plays in a certain system, then it seems that the same something could have different mental content depending on the sociological or biological system in which it is lodged. Conjoin this with internalism, and you have a rejection of CE.

¹⁶ See Frances (2007) for development of this point.

act of knowledge that, intrinsically, does not change. Again, this is only problematic if one assumes CE. But to reiterate ourselves, the theist, upon seeing such an incompatibility, will simply deny CE and move one. Is this *ad hoc* in any illegitimate way? Only if it is so to accept the implications of that theory which, by one's own lights, is the best on offer.

Notice that an interesting implication of taking this route is that now the theist could even affirm that God's *knowledge* (in the predicative sense)¹⁷ changes and even that God *successively* knows what time it is, without this having to lead to any intrinsic change or succession within God. Indeed, assuming premise 12 above, the step from God's *knowledge* changing to *God* himself changing can only be made *given CE*. If knowledge is an extrinsic property *and* content essentialism is false, God's knowledge about mutable reality can change without this signifying or entailing any intrinsic change in God (preserving immutability).

Of course, this clashes with the claims of some authorities within the theistic tradition. Aquinas, for instance, defended that God knows everything that he knows eternally and "all at once", without succession. But why did Aquinas claim this? It seems to us because he affirmed something very much like CE, as can be apparently inferred from this quote:

It is impossible that the intellect that considers multiple things successively has only one operation. *Since operations differ according to their objects*, it is necessary that the operation by which the intellect considers the first thing be different than the operation by which it considers the second. But the divine intellect is only one operation, which is his essence, as was proved. Hence, the divine intellect does not consider everything it knows successively, but all at once. (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, c. 55; our italics and our translation)

Aquinas's response comes at the price, though, of putting pressure on the objective reality of the passage of time, and seemingly pushes the theist to some kind of B-theory.¹⁸ The theist can avoid going this route by simply denying CE. That CE is false is a logical consequence of his theory. Thus, if the theist has enough justification to embrace his theory, he likewise has enough justification to embrace his theory's implications (barring strict contradictions, sure, but weirdness is not *per se* contradictory). If CE can be true only if classical theism, for instance, is false, to argue against classical theism assuming CE is to beg the question.

4. God's contingent knowledge

¹⁷ See note 5 above. Knowledge attributions to God are successively made true with the passage of time.

¹⁸ In fact, that is how Kretzmann (1966, 413–414) reacts to this very quote in his paper.

Interestingly, it seems plausible that those theists that embrace simplicity already have to deny one of these two assumptions to make room for God's contingent knowledge. As Grant (2012) has argued, the following four claims appear inconsistent:

ST: The divine substance is not composed in any way; nor are there entities intrinsic to God distinct from the divine substance.

CK: God knows some contingent truth.

KT: Necessarily, God's knowing some truth *T* implies some entity intrinsic to God that would not exist were God not knowing *T*.

NB: The divine substance exists necessarily.

Suppose a possible world W_1 where *T* is true, and a possible world W_2 where *T* is not true. By CK we can suppose that God knows *T* in W_1 but not in W_2 . From its conjunction with KT, we obtain that, in W_1 , there is some entity E_1 intrinsic to God that God lacks in W_2 . But then, through NB, such an entity E_1 cannot be identified with the divine substance, that exists both in W_1 and W_2 . Hence, a contradiction with ST ensues —there is something intrinsic to God distinct from the divine substance.¹⁹

Now, since ST, CK and NB seem core commitments of the classical theist tradition, the most natural way for classical theists to resolve the tension is to simply deny KT: God knowing some truth *T* does *not* imply some entity intrinsic to God that would not exist were God not knowing *T*. Or, in other words, God can know different truths in different possible worlds without any intrinsic variation in Him. And this, Grant (2012, 257–259) argues, will imply denying either content essentialism or “the intrinsicness of God's contingent cognitional states” (Grant 2012, 259), that is, internalism about beliefs (or acts of knowledge).²⁰ If one denies content essentialism, the content of a belief or act of

¹⁹ In light of his previous quote, this would be a good question to pose to Aquinas: if (i) operations differ according to their objects, and (ii) God's act of knowledge has different objects in different possible worlds, and (iii) God is identical to his own act of knowledge . . . doesn't it follow that God differs from God across possible worlds?

²⁰ Since Grant (2012, 258) finds content essentialism hard to deny, he proposes the theist opt for an extrinsic model of divine knowledge (other theists who adopt similar solutions to the problem of God's contingent knowledge include Pruss 2008 and Brower 2009). We don't share Grant's strong intuition in favor of content essentialism (and the more we think about it, the less we do). It seems to us that denying content essentialism can't be *a priori* any less plausible than externalism about beliefs or acts of knowledge. In any case, the end result of both avenues appears to be identical: a knower can remain intrinsically the same while the content of what the knower knows varies. We don't quite get why this should be any more plausible if we understand the knowing as an extrinsic state of the knower instead of an intrinsic *je-ne-sais-quoi* within the knower whose content can vary extrinsically.

knowledge could vary from world to world without the belief or act itself undergoing any intrinsic variation.²¹ And from the adoption of some extrinsic model of divine knowledge, since God's knowing or believing is extrinsically constituted, *it* could vary from world to world without implying any intrinsic variation within God himself.²²

If this is correct, the way we propose the theist solve Kretzmann's challenge will be even more natural and immediate for *classical* theists, as they must already deny either CE or internalism (at least when referred to God) to explain how God remains intrinsically identically the same in all possible worlds despite his knowledge (the content of what God knows) being different in each. That *classical* theism entails the falsehood of one of this two assumptions is even more apparent in light of these considerations.

4. Going Deeper

We have so far identified two unstated and undefended premises in Kretzmann's argument –internalism about beliefs and content essentialism–, either of which can be simply denied by the theist on the grounds that their falsehood follows from theism. These are undercutting considerations: the proponent of Kretzmann's argument needs to do more if he wants to convince the theist to abandon either omniscience or immutability or both. In particular, he needs to go beyond the bare assertion that these premises are intuitive or obvious and put forward non-question-begging reasons in favor of them.

What we would like to do now is to push the issue a little further, beyond undercutting defeaters into the realm of a rebuttal. We want to raise awareness to the fact that, in needing both these positions to be true, Kretzmann's argument

²¹ As Grant (2012, 258n7) notes, William E. Mann (1983, 272–264) appears to opt precisely for this solution when considering the problem of God's contingent knowledge. Mann acknowledged that "it is possible for the content of God's omniscience to be other than what it is" (Mann 1983, 273), but that from this it doesn't follow that the power or activity by which God knows all things could likewise have been other than what it is. Indeed, we can see now that such a conclusion only follows given content essentialism.

²² Does this mean that the classical theist cannot continue saying that God is identical to his own act of knowledge? Maybe. For instance, regarding one possible extrinsic model of divine knowledge, Grant writes: "on the Immediate Cognition Model God's act of knowing has the contingent reality known as an essential constituent. God's knowledge of contingent reality is unmediated in the strongest sense possible. Rover –all four paws and sixty-three pounds– directly constitutes (with the knowing relation) God's state and act of knowing him. God's cognitive state, *his act of knowing*, extends out beyond God to embrace the contingent things in themselves, and those contingent realities, in turn, directly inform God's acts of knowing" (Grant 2012, 266, *our italics*). It is hard to see how God could be identical to his own act of knowledge if God's act of knowledge "extends beyond God" and "has the contingent reality known as an essential constituent." However, this may reduce to a semantic quarrel.

might actually hide an inconsistency. How so? Because, as has been argued by Marian David (2002), it seems that standard *externalist* arguments depend for their success on the truth of content essentialism.

Recall Hilary Putnam's (1973) Twin Earth thought experiment. We are asked to imagine that there is, in some unknown corner of the universe, a planet, Twin Earth, which is an exact copy of Earth except in one little detail: there is on it no water. Instead, in its place we have a liquid substance, *twater*, superficially identical to water though composed not of H₂O, but XYZ. Now, *ex hypothesi*, Twin Earthlings have all the same identical intrinsic states and properties than us and refer to *twater* using the same string of sounds ("water") as we do.²³ Rewind to a time were the chemical composition of neither water nor *twater* was known and focus on Peter and Twin Peter. Once we do that, the argument seems to lead to the following conclusion: everything intrinsic to Peter and Twin Peter is the same, and still, Peter has no beliefs about *twater*, nor Twin Peter about water. When Peter thinks "Water is wet", he is believing and assenting to the proposition *Water is wet*, but when Twin Peter thinks "Water is wet", he is believing and assenting to the proposition *Twater is wet*. Hence, so the argument goes, Peter and Twin Peter don't have the same mental state or belief, despite everything intrinsic to them being identical. Thus, externalism presents itself: what belief somebody is in is at least partially determined by factors outside their own head.

But now notice how this conclusion only follows *assuming content essentialism* (David 2002, 105). Indeed, only through the assumption that beliefs or mental states have their contents essentially are we lead to the conclusion that Peter and Twin Peter's *beliefs or mental states* must be different (and hence, extrinsically individuated) by virtue of *their content* being different. If, instead, one denies content essentialism, the conclusion does not follow: some kind of *content externalism* might follow, where *the content* of a belief or mental state depends on factors outside of the mind, but internalism about the mental is preserved (David 2002, 105–106).

Surely, externalist arguments are controversial, as is almost anything in philosophy. Still, their heavy reliance on content essentialism suggests a close connection between the two positions, and hence a potential tension between content essentialism and internalism. In other words, if these arguments have any merit, it is plausible to think that either content essentialism pushes us away from internalism or that, to keep internalism, one must reject content essentialism.²⁴ In any case, this apparent tension between the two positions

²³ This is in fact not entirely possible, since the bodies of Earthlings would contain a certain percentage of water, while the bodies of Twin Earthlings would have the equivalent percentage of *twater*. But it is easy to amend the thought experiment, so nothing of substance hinges upon this. Thus, we prefer to keep Putnam's original example.

²⁴ Marian David (2002, 106), in fact, suggests doing the latter.

should, we claim, raise some eyebrows when confronted with an argument that requires both of them to be true.

5. In Conclusion

We have explored Norman Kretzmann's argument that an immutable God could not always know what time it is. In explaining the argument, we uncovered two implicit assumptions: internalism about beliefs and content essentialism. Indeed, that God's changing knowledge of what time it is entails a change *in* God himself only follows if one assumes (i) that beliefs are wholly intrinsic to cognitive agents and (ii) that beliefs have their content essentially. Given these two assumptions, yes, for God to keep track of what time it is, some internal change in God is required, and hence, it would be impossible for God to know mutable reality through an intrinsically immutable act of knowledge.

However, we have suggested that these two premises are insufficiently supported in the context of the argument (especially content essentialism), and that it is well within the theist's epistemic rights to simply deny one of them, if not wholeheartedly, at least when applied to God. Kretzmann's argument shows that the theist can't hold to an immutable and omniscient God while being an internalist or believing in content essentialism —but in that case, the theist will just abandon one of these positions (if he hadn't done so already for independent reasons), and to insist that he should abandon or modify theism because internalism and content essentialism are obviously true will be to beg the question.

Lastly, we have put on the table the worry that, in fact, internalism and content essentialism might be in tension because of standard externalist arguments. Indeed, it seems that these arguments heavily rely on content essentialism to make their points. But then, either content essentialism pushes us away from internalism, or to protect internalism we'd be better advised to deny content essentialism. In any case, Kretzmann's argument seems to stand on shaky ground²⁵.

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²⁵ The present paper is a result of the research project "Providence and Free Will in the Models of Classical Theism and Analytic Theism" (PID2021-122633NB-I00), of which one of us (Enric) is part. The project is financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain

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