

INFALLIBLE DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE CANNOT UNIQUELY THREATEN HUMAN FREEDOM, BUT ITS MECHANICS MIGHT

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Abstract. It is not uncommon to think that the existence of exhaustive and infallible divine foreknowledge uniquely threatens the existence of human freedom. This paper shows that this cannot be so. For, to uniquely threaten human freedom, infallible divine foreknowledge would have to make an essential contribution to an explanation for why our actions are not up to us. And infallible divine foreknowledge cannot do this. There remains, however, an important question about the compatibility of freedom and foreknowledge. It is a question not about the existence of foreknowledge, but about its mechanics.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, my main goal is to argue that infallible divine foreknowledge (IDF) cannot uniquely threaten human freedom. Successfully arguing for this claim will help to explain why some, like David Hunt (1999), have found it ‘preposterous’ to think that IDF by itself could undermine freedom.¹ Hunt writes, for example, that ‘the supposed incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom lacks all prima facie credibility’ (1999: 20). At the same time, however, I believe that there remain interesting and significant questions about the compatibility of IDF and human freedom. I will highlight one such interesting question in particular, a question about the mechanics of IDF, arguing that debate about freedom and foreknowledge would profit from focusing more

¹ Another writer who has made this same point is William Lane Craig (1987). See also (Hunt 1998).

directly on this question than on those arguments typically forwarded to show that IDF poses a significant threat to human freedom.

In the first section of the paper, I will explain more carefully what it would take for IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom. What we will see is that for IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom, it must be that IDF makes an essential contribution to an explanation for why what humans do is not up to them. I will argue in section two, however, that IDF cannot make this sort of essential contribution. So, IDF cannot uniquely threaten human freedom. In section three, I attempt to re-focus the debate on freedom and foreknowledge by moving this debate away from the question of whether the existence of IDF by itself undermines human freedom and toward a related question about whether the mechanics required for explaining IDF threatens human freedom. This latter question, I contend, is one concerning which there is more fruitful future discussion to be had.

I. WHAT IT WOULD BE FOR IDF TO UNIQUELY THREATEN HUMAN FREEDOM

In section two, I will argue that mere IDF alone could not pose a unique threat to human freedom. Before doing so, I need to explain what this claim amounts to. I need to explain, that is, what it would be for IDF itself to uniquely threaten human freedom. I will do that in this section by presenting a version of the freedom-foreknowledge argument commonly used by philosophers to argue for the incompatibility of IDF and human freedom and by comparing this argument with two other, similar arguments. What we will see is that for IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom IDF needs to make an essential contribution to an explanation for why what humans do is not up to them.

We can start by building a simple version of the freedom-foreknowledge argument typically used by philosophers to argue that IDF undermines human freedom.² To present this argument, we will make use of some claims about God's foreknowledge, some claims about what philosophers call 'accidental necessity', and some claims about freedom. Begin with the theological claim that:

- (1) God believes at t_1 that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} .

² The presentation here follows roughly that outlined in (Zagzebski 2011a). Another classic contemporary source for this argument is (Pike 1969).

Let t_1 be a past time long, long, before t_{100} , and let Joe be an ordinary human agent and let his lawn-mowing be pre-theoretically as good a candidate as any for a free action. (1) is secured by the assumptions that God has exhaustive foreknowledge and that Joe in fact mows his lawn at t_{100} .³ Now, given traditional assumptions about God's infallibility, the following claim is also true:

(2) Necessarily, for all times t and propositions p , if God believes at t that p , then p .

Thus, God's believing at t_1 that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} entails that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} . These are all of the theological claims we need for our argument.

Next, we need to make three claims about what philosophers call 'accidental necessity'. Accidental necessity is a kind of necessity which propositions about the past have in virtue of being about the past.⁴ Since what these propositions report is over-and-done-with, there is nothing that can now be done about it. This is a quality, our arguer claims, which all propositions about the past have. Thus,

(3) Necessarily, if p is a proposition about the past relative to a time t , then p is accidentally necessary at t .

A second important feature of accidental necessity is the following:

(4) For all agents S , actions A and times t and t' , if it is accidentally necessary at t' that S does A at t , then at t' it isn't up to S whether S does A at t .

The support for (4) is that, intuitively, we can't do anything about what is necessary. Because we can't do anything about what is necessary, what is necessary isn't up to us. If, at our time, something is necessary at another time, then we can't make it otherwise than it is – its being so is not under our control. This appears to be paradigmatically the case for the sort of

³ I am oversimplifying a bit here. In order to secure (1) it must also be the case that (i) God knows by having beliefs, that (ii) God's beliefs are in time, and that (iii) propositions about the future don't change their truth-values such that, for instance, at t_1 Joe will mow at t_{100} but at t_2 Joe will not mow at t_{100} . (i) has been denied by (Alston 1986) to which (Hasker 1988) replies. (ii) has been denied by, *inter alia*, (Stump and Kretzman 1981), though it has been argued that the timelessness solution is not sufficient to address the philosophical problem of freedom and foreknowledge in, *inter alia*, (Zagzebski 2011b). (iii) has been denied by (Todd 2011), to which (Byerly forthcoming c) replies.

⁴ Zagzebski (2011a) is especially clear about this.

over-and-done-with necessity that ‘accidental necessity’ is supposed to constitute. If S’s doing A were now over-and-done-with, for instance, then it would not now be up to S whether S does A. The final important claim we need about accidental necessity is that it works like certain other kinds of metaphysical necessities in that it obeys axiom K contained in all five classical systems of modal logic. Applied to accidental necessity, this axiom tells us that:

(5) If p is accidentally necessary at t, and p entails q, then q is accidentally necessary at t.

(3), (4), and (5) are all of the principles about accidental necessity we need for our argument.

The final principle we need for our argument is a principle about freedom. The principle says:

(6) For all agents S, actions A and times t, if it isn’t up to S at t whether S does A at t, then it is not the case that S does A freely at t.

(6) is supposed to be simply an analytic truth about the nature of free action. From (1)-(6) it follows that it is not the case that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} freely. For, by (1), God believed at t_1 that Joe would mow at t_{100} . And, by (3), that God so believed is accidentally necessary at t_{100} .⁵ But, by (2), that God so believed entails that Joe mows at t_{100} . Thus, given (5), Joe’s mowing at t_{100} is accidentally necessary at t_{100} . (4) then implies that it isn’t up to Joe at t_{100} whether Joe mows at t_{100} . And, by (6), this implies that Joe doesn’t mow freely at t_{100} .

Since Joe was an arbitrarily selected human agent and his mowing was just as good a candidate for a free action as any, the argument here presented generalizes. IDF, the argument attempts to show, presents a significant problem for human freedom. This is because of claims about foreknowledge, claims about accidental necessity, and claims about freedom. Thus, we have a powerful argument for the conclusion that no human beings ever perform actions freely that is motivated by claims about IDF.

⁵ This step assumes that God’s believing at t_1 that Joe will mow at t_{100} is a proposition about the past relative to t_{100} . Of course, the Ockhamist response to the argument for theological fatalism denies this claim. See, e.g., (Warfield 2010). Nonetheless, the claim that propositions like (1) are not propositions about the past has proven difficult to defend. See, e.g., (Todd forthcoming).

Let the above argument suffice for a presentation of the freedom-foreknowledge argument as it is typically found in the philosophical literature. The argument attempts to show that IDF threatens human freedom. Our question here, though, is whether IDF *uniquely* threatens human freedom. In the remainder of this section, I want to consider what this claim amounts to – what it would take, that is, for IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom. I then argue in the next section that IDF *cannot* do this.

To get clear on what it would take for IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom, it will be helpful to highlight how the freedom-foreknowledge argument just presented bears certain significant similarities to two other arguments. In fact, following Linda Zagzebski (2011a and b), we might think of these three arguments as forming a family of three fatalistic arguments. They are all fatalistic arguments because they all provide arguments for the conclusion that no person ever performs any action freely.

The freedom-foreknowledge argument presents an argument for fatalism by appealing to exhaustive IDF. The claims this argument makes which will distinguish it from our other two fatalist arguments are (1) and (2). (1) is a supposition justified by the presumption of exhaustive divine foreknowledge, whereas (2) is secured by the doctrine of divine infallibility. These two claims, when combined with (3)-(6), make trouble for human freedom.

But, we can generate arguments that threaten human freedom which parallel this argument for theological fatalism by replacing (1) and (2) with non-theological claims. First, we can replace (1) and (2) with claims about truth-values of propositions about the future. By doing so, we will get what is typically called the argument for ‘logical fatalism’. Here we will replace (1) with

(1’) It was true at t_1 that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} .

and we will replace (2) with:

(2’) Necessarily, for all times t and t' and all events e , if it was true at t that e occurs at t' , then e occurs at t' .

With (1’) and (2’) in place, the rest of the argument trots on as before. The argument now purports to show that the mere fact that there are propositions about the future actions of humans which are true in the distant past threatens to undermine human freedom.

Similarly, we get an argument for causal fatalism by replacing (1) and (2) of the argument for theological fatalism with claims justified by causal determinism. Causal determinism is typically defined as the thesis that the state of the world at any time together with the laws of nature entails the state of the world at all other times.⁶ In accordance with causal determinism, we might replace (1) with

(1'') The state of the world at t_1 is S and the laws of the world at t_1 are L.
and we might replace (2) with

(2'') Necessarily, if the state of the world at t_1 is S and the laws of the world at t_1 are L, then Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} .

Here, 'S' is a placeholder for a complete description of the state of the world w we are imagining in which Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} and 'L' is a placeholder for the laws of w . (2'') simply reports a consequence of the causal determinist's thesis – namely, that in any world with the past and laws of w , Joe does as he does in w . Thus, we have a third fatalist argument, this one generated by claims justified by causal determinism.

We have seen, then, that the freedom-foreknowledge argument as it is typically presented has much in common with these two other fatalistic arguments – the argument for logical fatalism and the argument for causal fatalism. Given the similarity of these arguments, what we must now consider is the following: What would it be for the freedom-foreknowledge argument to show that IDF poses a *unique* threat to human freedom?

If IDF is to pose a threat to human freedom which is to be distinct from the threats posed by the logical and causal fatalist arguments, then it must be that premises (1) and (2) make a significant difference over premises (1') and (2') and premises (1'') and (2''). For (1) and (2) to make a significant difference over (1') and (2'), and (1'') and (2''), it must be that there is some reason for thinking that actions are never up to us, given claims like (1) and (2), which reason is not supplied given only either claims like (1') and (2') or claims like (1'') and (2''). For, each of these three fatalist arguments is supposed to show that freedom is threatened because claims like the first two premises of the argument in view imply that our actions are not up to us. Thus, for IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom, IDF must supply *unique* reason to think that our actions are not up to us. It must be that claims like (1) and (2) support

⁶ See, e.g., (Hofer 2010)

this conclusion in a way that it is not supported by claims like (1') and (2') or (1'') and (2''). To use the specific example referred to in (1) and (2), it must be that God's infallibly forebelieving at t_1 that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} provides special reason for thinking that Joe's mowing at t_{100} is not up to Joe – reason which is not supplied by (1') and (2') or by (1'') and (2'').

Now, what is it for claims like (1) and (2) to supply special reason for thinking our actions are not up to us in this way? I submit that it is for claims like (1) and (2) to make an essential contribution to an explanation of why our actions are not up to us. It is for claims like (1) and (2) to make a contribution to an explanation of why our actions are not up to us which contribution is not made by any other claims – like (1') and (2') or (1'') and (2''). In our example, it is for God's infallibly forebelieving at t_1 that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} to make an essential contribution to an explanation of why Joe's mowing at t_{100} isn't up to him – a contribution not made by (1') and (2') or (1'') and (2''). It may be, of course, that the fact that Joe's mowing isn't up to him is explanatorily overdetermined – that there are, in addition to God's infallible forebeliefs about Joe, other equally good explanations of why Joe's mowing isn't up to him. But, if IDF is to make a difference – if it is to supply special reason for thinking that Joe's mowing isn't up to him – then it must contribute to an explanation for why Joe's mowing is not up to him, and it must do so in a way that its contribution is irreplaceable. Thus, to claim that IDF poses a unique threat to human freedom is to say that IDF makes an essential contribution to an explanation for why our actions aren't up to us – that, e.g., God's forebelieving at t_1 that Joe mows at t_{100} makes an essential contribution to an explanation for why Joe's mowing at t_{100} isn't up to Joe. In what follows, instead of saying that IDF 'makes an essential contribution to an explanation for' why what we do is not up to us, I will sometimes simply say that IDF 'uniquely explains' why what we do is not up to us. In the next section, I will argue that IDF *cannot* uniquely explain in this way why what we do is not up to us. IDF cannot, then, uniquely threaten human freedom.

II. WHY FOREKNOWLEDGE CAN'T UNIQUELY THREATEN HUMAN FREEDOM

What we saw in the previous section was that if IDF is to pose a unique threat to human freedom, then God's infallibly forebelieving at t_1 that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} must uniquely explain why Joe's mowing isn't up to

him at t_{100} – God’s infallible forebelief must make an essential contribution to an explanation for why Joe’s mowing isn’t up to Joe. I now want to argue that God’s infallibly forebelieving at t_1 that Joe mows at t_{100} cannot uniquely explain why Joe’s mowing at t_{100} isn’t up to Joe. More generally, IDF cannot uniquely explain why our actions are not up to us. So, IDF cannot uniquely threaten human freedom.

To see why God’s infallible forebelief about Joe cannot uniquely explain why Joe’s mowing isn’t up to him, we must attend to a question I will call *the explanation question*. The explanation question asks about the explanatory relationship between God’s forebelieving at t_1 that Joe mows his lawn at t_{100} and Joe’s mowing his lawn at t_{100} . This is subtly, but importantly, different from asking about the explanatory relationship between God’s forebelieving and whether Joe’s mowing is up to him. What the explanation question asks about is the explanatory relationship between God’s infallible forebelieving and Joe’s *mowing*, not whether Joe’s mowing is up to him. I see four options for answering this question. But, the two which are most independently attractive will not permit God’s infallible forebelief to uniquely threaten Joe’s freedom. And, the two which might have a chance at defending the claim that God’s infallible forebelief uniquely threatens Joe’s freedom are independently very unattractive.

Begin with the two more independently attractive options for answering our explanation question. The first alternative for answering our explanation question is to affirm that Joe’s mowing at t_{100} explains God’s infallibly forebelieving at t_1 that Joe will mow at t_{100} . This answer to our explanation question has been almost universally affirmed by those who think that creaturely freedom and infallible divine foreknowledge are consistent.⁷ It is an independently attractive option for answering our explanation question. But, this alternative will not permit infallible foreknowledge to pose a unique threat for human freedom. For, strikingly, if this answer to our explanation question is given, then the supposition that God’s infallible forebelief about Joe uniquely threatens Joe’s freedom leads to an absurdity, given the plausible assumption that explanations are transitive.

⁷ To see this, consider what a wide variety of solutions to the freedom-foreknowledge argument have endorsed this idea that divine (fore)beliefs are explained by what makes their contents true: Augustinian solutions (see Hunt 1999), Boethian solutions (see Rota 2010), Molinist solutions (Merricks 2011), and Ockhamist solutions (see Plantinga 1986).

To say that explanations are transitive is to say the following: for all explanations e , e' , and e'' , if e explains e' and e' explains e'' , then e explains e'' . The claim that explanations are transitive, like the claim that causes are transitive, has enjoyed widespread support, and it seems to make good sense of many ordinary examples.⁸ For instance, if I was late for the morning session because I felt sick, and I felt sick because I ate some bad fish last night, then I was late for the morning session because I ate some bad fish last night. If my moving my arm in a certain way explains why the marker moves in an 'R' pattern in contact with the board, and the marker's moving in this pattern explains why there is an 'R' pattern of ink on the board, then my moving my arm in a certain way explains why there is an 'R' pattern of ink on the board. Transitivity appears to hold even when some of the explanations involved are (at least apparently) backwards explanations.⁹ If the volcano is smoking because it is going to explode, and the people are leaving because the volcano is smoking, then the people are leaving because the volcano is going to explode.

Suppose, then, that explanations are indeed transitive. We now run into an absurdity, given this first option concerning the explanatory relationship between God's infallible forebelief and Joe's mowing, if we wish to maintain that IDF poses a unique threat to human freedom. For, on this first option, Joe's mowing at t_{100} is said to explain God's infallible forebelief at t_1 that Joe mows at t_{100} . But, if IDF is to pose a unique threat to human freedom, then it must be that God's infallible forebelief at t_1 that Joe mows at t_{100} uniquely explains why it isn't up to Joe whether he mows at t_{100} . Thus, given the transitivity of explanations, it follows that Joe's mowing at t_{100} explains why it isn't up to Joe whether he mows at t_{100} . That is, it isn't up to Joe whether he mows at t_{100} because Joe mows at t_{100} . But, this is absurd! It cannot be that Joe's freedom with respect to mowing is threatened by his very mowing – that by the very act of mowing Joe makes it the case that his mowing isn't up to him. So, we must reject one of the suppositions which got us to this conclusion. Given that explanations are transitive, we must either reject the claim that God's infallible forebelief poses a special threat to Joe's freedom, or we must reject the claim that Joe's mowing his lawn at t_{100} explains

⁸ For the transitivity of causation, see (Hall 2000). For the transitivity of explanation, see (Hasker 1997).

⁹ For a defence of the ubiquity of legitimate backward explanations, see (Jenkins and Nolan 2011). For criticism of this defence, see (Byerly forthcoming a).

God's infallible forebelief that Joe mows. This first option for answering our explanation question, then, while independently attractive, cannot be offered by someone who wants to defend the idea that IDF poses a unique threat to human freedom.

There is a second option for answering our explanation question which is still somewhat independently attractive. On this option, Joe's mowing and God's forebelieving that Joe mows share a common explanation. What explains God's forebeliefs about Joe's mowing and what explains Joe's mowing is one and the same, though neither Joe's mowing nor God's forebelief explains the other. Apart from the first answer to our question above according to which Joe's mowing explains God's forebelief about his mowing, this way of pursuing this third strategy may be the most popular response to our question.

There are at least two ways of pursuing this answer to our question of which I am aware in the philosophical literature – a Molinist account of divine foreknowledge and a theological determinist account of divine foreknowledge.¹⁰ After briefly characterizing these accounts here, I wish to show that if one answers the explanation question by appealing to one of them, then one cannot claim that IDF presents a unique challenge for human freedom. Indeed, more generally, on this second option, IDF will not make an essential contribution to an explanation for why what humans do is not up to them.

Begin with a brief characterization of Molinism. The key to Molinism is counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. These are subjunctive conditionals whose antecedents specify circumstances that God might bring about and whose consequents specify what creatures would freely do in these circumstances. Thus, these counterfactuals have the form $\langle \text{were } C \text{ the case, then } S \text{ would do } A \text{ freely} \rangle$ where C is a circumstance, S is a creature, and A is an action.¹¹

On a standard Molinist account, the law of conditional excluded middle holds: for every circumstance C , agent S and action A , either $\langle \text{were } C \text{ the case, } S \text{ would freely do } A \rangle$ or $\langle \text{were } C \text{ the case, } S \text{ would not freely do } A \rangle$ is true. Further, whichever of these conditionals is in fact true is eternally true such that long before S is ever born, this conditional

¹⁰ For standard defences of Molinism, see (Flint 1998) and (Craig 1990). Standard defences of theological determinism are lacking in the philosophical literature; though, see (Wainwright 2001), (Rudder-Baker 2003), and (McCann 1995).

¹¹ For more details on what goes into these counterfactuals, see (Wierenga 2011).

is true. Thus, this conditional is something which is a possible object of knowledge even prior to creation, and the Molinist tells us that it is known by God.

God's knowledge of these conditionals is what allows God to have infallible foreknowledge of what creatures will freely do. For instance, for an agent S, God can know whether S will do A freely or will freely do something else by knowing all of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom pertaining to S and by knowing which circumstances God himself wills to bring about. The explanation, then, for how God knows that Joe will mow at t_{100} has to do with the circumstances C that obtain up to the point of Joe's decision to mow together with the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom which report what Joe would do in these circumstances. God knows that Joe will mow, then, because God knows these subjunctive conditionals and because God knows what circumstances he himself wills to bring about.

But, on at least one version of Molinism, the explanation for why Joe mows at t_{100} is just the same as the explanation for how God knows that Joe will mow.¹² Joe mows at t_{100} *because* some subjunctive conditional of the form < were C the case, Joe would freely mow > is true and God has willed to bring about circumstance C. Thus, on this version of Molinism, the same facts that explain how God knows what his creatures will freely do explain why those creatures do what they do.

The theological determinist view of divine foreknowledge I have in mind says that creatures behave freely in the way they do because God has willed them to behave in this way, and his willing them to behave in this way causally brings it about that they behave in this way. In the same way, God knows what his creatures will freely do because he knows what he has willed for them to do, and he knows that what he wills them to do they will do. Thus, on this theological determinist view, God knows that Joe will mow at t_{100} for the same reason that Joe mows at t_{100} – because God has willed for Joe to mow at t_{100} .

Unfortunately, neither of these models for answering our explanation question will permit IDF itself to pose a unique threat to human freedom. For, on neither of these models does IDF make an essential contribution to an explanation of why human actions are not up to them. For each

¹² Though unpopular, a version of Molinism which might take this approach would be one which views the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom as brute facts. For discussion of this view, see (Adams 1977).

model, although there may be a threat posed to human freedom by the model, it is not a threat that depends in any way on the existence of IDF. Rather, the conditions required for the existence of IDF, and not IDF itself, are themselves what pose the unique threat to human freedom.

Take the Molinist model. If this model provides a unique explanation of why our actions are not up to us, it does so because the model requires the existence of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom together with divine willings – not because of IDF. If Joe's mowing is not up to him because of the conditions required for this model, for instance, this is because of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom reporting that he would mow under certain circumstances together with facts about divine willings. If these facts uniquely explain why Joe's mowing isn't up to him, they do so whether or not they lead to IDF. These facts would continue to explain why Joe's mowing wasn't up to him, for instance, even if God didn't hold any beliefs about Joe's mowing. So, on this Molinist model, IDF itself makes no essential contribution to an explanation for why Joe's mowing isn't up to him. And the same goes for the relationship between IDF and human actions more generally on this model. On this Molinist model, the existence of IDF does not make an essential contribution to an explanation for why our actions are not up to us. Its contribution is at best a non-essential by-product of such an explanation. So, this Molinist model will not permit IDF to pose a unique threat to human freedom.

Similar comments are in store for the theological determinist model. Here too, if there is a threat posed to human freedom by the model, it is a threat posed independently of the existence of IDF. For, if there is a threat posed to human freedom by this model, it is a threat posed by the relationship between human action and divine willings. On this model, what humans do they do as a result of God's willing them to do so. If this relationship between divine willings and human actions uniquely explains why human actions aren't up to humans, then it does so quite independently of whether IDF also exists. So, here too IDF cannot make an essential contribution to an explanation for why human actions are not up to us. And, so, IDF cannot here pose a unique threat to human freedom.

What goes for the Molinist and theological determinist iterations of this second strategy plausibly goes for other imaginable iterations as well. On any version of this second strategy, what explains the existence of IDF also explains what humans do. But, for any such strategy, that which explains what humans do could explain what they do without explaining

the existence of IDF. Thus, for any iteration of this second strategy, it will not be the case that IDF itself makes an essential contribution to an explanation for why what humans do is not up to them. If models which follow this second strategy do uniquely explain why what humans do isn't up to them, they will do so independently of the existence of IDF.

So much for the two answers to our explanation question which have some independent plausibility. The other two answers to this question, while they might allow for more hope concerning IDF posing a unique threat to human freedom, nonetheless suffer because they are independently implausible as answers to the explanation question.

Suppose, first, that one answers our explanation question by claiming that God's infallible forebelief explains why Joe mows. Joe mows at t_{100} because God believes at t_1 that Joe mows at t_{100} . This response to our explanation question has perhaps the best shot at permitting IDF to uniquely explain why human actions are not up to us. For, it has a good shot at permitting IDF to make an essential contribution to an explanation of why these actions aren't up to us – a contribution which isn't made without it. Unfortunately, this answer to our question about the explanatory relationship between God's forebelief and Joe's mowing has not been popular at all.¹³ And, its unpopularity is for good reason. I will briefly discuss two problems for this account here which help to show why it is not an independently plausible response to our explanation question.

First, this account succumbs to a suspicious form of anti-realism. On this response to our explanation question, God's beliefs determine how reality is. For, presumably, it will not be just Joe's mowing that occurs because God believes it will occur, but *any* event is like this. For every event that occurs or doesn't occur in the history of the world, it occurs because God believed it would occur or it doesn't occur because God believed it wouldn't occur. This view is objectionable, however. For, it seems that, even if *per impossibile*, were God to have decided *not* to hold a belief about whether Joe will mow at t_{100} , Joe still would have either mowed or not mowed at t_{100} .¹⁴ Insofar as the defender of the freedom-

¹³ This is not to say, however, that it has not been endorsed by some. Aquinas appears to have thought that this answer got the explanatory order of divine beliefs and human acts correct, at least. See *Summa Theologica* I, Q.14.A8. Aquinas, of course, did not think that God's beliefs were in time. Thus, his view would escape the overdetermination problem highlighted in the text.

¹⁴ I say 'even if *per impossibile*' because some, including myself, think that it is metaphysically impossible for God to fail to have a belief about whether Joe will mow.

foreknowledge argument finds this sort of anti-realism unattractive, as this author does, she will not want to advocate this answer to our question about the explanatory relationship between God's infallible forebelief and Joe's mowing. This answer to our question is independently implausible.

A second difficulty with this response to our explanation question has to do with its commitment to massive explanatory overdetermination. Joe mows at t_{100} , according to this response, because God believed *at* t_1 that he would mow at t_{100} . But, why is t_1 so important? Why not pick some other time at which God believed that Joe would mow at t_{100} ? Why not, for that matter, pick t_{100} itself? Presumably, at t_{100} , God believes that Joe mows at t_{100} . Why think that it is God's beliefs at t_1 that explain why Joe mows and not God's beliefs at t_{100} instead? Of course, it could be that God's beliefs at *both* these times – indeed, at *all* of the times – explain why Joe mows. But, here again this answer to our question seems to have, if anything, gotten things backwards. Given this answer to our question, when we ask why Joe mowed at t_{100} , our answer will be that he mowed at t_{100} because of what God believed at t_1 and because of what God believed at t_2 and because of what God believed at t_3 and so on for every other time (perhaps including even the future times). But, this highlights a second unattractive feature of the present response to our explanation question. For this response unnecessarily adopts massive explanatory overdetermination. Joe's mowing at t_{100} , and any event at any time for that matter, will be massively explanatorily overdetermined by God's beliefs at every time. A response to our explanation question, like the first two responses we considered, which didn't require such massive explanatory overdetermination is far more independently attractive than this third answer.¹⁵ Thus, despite its

They think that it is necessary that either Joe will mow or Joe will not mow, and that it is necessary that if Joe will mow God believed this and if Joe will not mow God believed that. If this is correct, then the conditional claim <were God to have decided not to hold a belief about whether Joe will mow, Joe still would have either mowed or not mowed> has an impossible antecedent. But, many, including myself, think that not all counterpossible claims like this are trivially true, though on some semantics for counterpossibles this is the case (see, e.g., (Lewis 1973)). Instead, we think that some counterpossibles are non-trivially true and some are false. The counterpossible claim in the text, I contend, is non-trivially true. Yet, given the response to our explanation question we are considering in the text, this conditional cannot be true. I take this as an objection to that answer to our explanation question. For more in defence of the non-trivial truth and falsity of counterpossible conditionals, see (Merricks 2003), (Berto 2009), and (Vander Laan 2004).

¹⁵ That a view countenances massive and unnecessary explanatory overdetermination is commonly thought to be a significant reason for rejecting that view. For some

potential promise for defending the idea the IDF poses a unique threat to human freedom, the present response to our explanation question should be rejected as independently implausible in light of its commitments to anti-realism and unnecessary explanatory overdetermination.

There is one final available response to our explanation question: claim that there is simply *no* explanatory relationship at all between God's infallible forebelief that Joe will mow and Joe's mowing. God doesn't believe that Joe will mow because Joe will mow, nor will Joe mow because God believes Joe will mow, nor is there a common explanation for both God's belief and Joe's mowing. This answer to our explanation question, I submit, is woefully independently unattractive. It is woefully independently unattractive because it implies that something which should be explicable is inexplicable. For, what this response says about the relationship between God's infallible forebelief about Joe and Joe's mowing its advocates will also need to say about the relationship between any of God's infallible forebeliefs about what humans will do and what these humans will do. Thus, for any proposition *p* concerning what a human being will do, the advocate of this solution will say that God will believe *p* if and only if *p* is true, but there will be no explanation of why this is so. The correspondence between divine beliefs about what humans will do and what humans will do is left entirely unexplained. It simply happens to be that for every claim *p* about what a human will do, God believes *p* if and only if *p* is true. He doesn't believe it because it is true, nor is *p* true because he believes it, nor is there some common explanation for why both *p* is true and God believes *p*. It just happens to be that divine beliefs and human acts correspond. This commitment to the inexplicability of what cries out for explanation makes this final alternative woefully independently unattractive. There must be some kind of explanatory relation between IDF and what humans do. The only explanatory relationships there might be, however, have already been surveyed. And for each of these relationships, either the relationship proposed is independently unattractive or it will not permit IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom. Thus, I conclude that there is no independently attractive response to our explanation question which will permit IDF to uniquely threaten human freedom. Plausibly, then, IDF cannot uniquely threaten human freedom. Human freedom is not

representative samples of arguments which invoke explanatory overdetermination in this way, see (Merricks 2003), (Kim 2005), and (Korman 2011).

threatened by IDF itself; if it is incompatible with IDF, there must be some further explanation for this. In the next section, I briefly address this possibility.

III. FROM THE EXISTENCE OF IDF TO THE MECHANICS OF IDF

If the argument of the preceding section is sound, then the existence of IDF cannot uniquely threaten human freedom. This result would go some distance toward vindicating the intuition that some, like David Hunt, have had to the effect that mere IDF couldn't possibly on its own threaten freedom. As Hunt queries, 'How could a third-party's knowledge of my future action, just by itself (and without special assumptions about the conditions under which such knowledge is possible), have any effect at all on the action, let alone transform it to such an extent that it no longer qualifies as free?' (Hunt 1999: 20) If the argument of the preceding section is sound, then the answer to the query is of course that it cannot. The existence of IDF cannot uniquely threaten human freedom.

And yet this does not imply that IDF and human freedom are compatible. For, as the parenthetical remark in Hunt's query indicates, there is more to ask about than the simple existence of IDF. We must also ask about *how* IDF is achieved. We must ask about the *mechanics* of IDF; to use Hunt's idiom, we must ask about those 'conditions under which such knowledge is possible'. For, it may be that while the bare existence of IDF does not pose any unique threat to human freedom, the existence of IDF requires some conditions which do pose such a threat. If the argument of the previous section is sound, then the existence of IDF cannot uniquely explain why what humans do isn't up to them. But, human freedom could still be incompatible with IDF if the mechanics whereby IDF is achieved did uniquely explain why what humans do isn't up to them. Thus, while IDF itself might not uniquely threaten human freedom, the mechanics required for securing it might.

To see just how such a mechanics-based threat to freedom might come about, we should consider again the views which fell under the second response to our explanation question above. That response was to affirm that while neither God's infallible forebeliefs nor human actions explain the other, they share a common explanation. We considered two iterations of this response – a Molinist iteration and a theological determinist iteration. Consider here again the theological determinist iteration. On this view, God has infallible foreknowledge of what humans

do, and humans do what they do, because God wills for human beings to do certain things. Human acts are, on this view, causally determined by divine willings. Now, according to many – libertarians, chiefly – this sort of account of the mechanics of IDF provides a very plausible example where the mechanics required for IDF, but not IDF itself, uniquely threatens human freedom. Even on this theological determinist view, as we saw earlier, IDF itself cannot uniquely threaten human freedom. For, IDF won't make an essential contribution to an explanation for why what humans do isn't up to them. Yet, if the conditions required for the existence of IDF are the conditions specified by this theological determinist model, then it may well still be that IDF and human freedom are incompatible. For, it may be that the existence of IDF requires the existence of some conditions – here, infallible divine willings concerning creaturely acts – which themselves uniquely explain why what humans do isn't up to them. These conditions, and not IDF itself, make an essential contribution to an explanation for why our actions are not up to us. Thus, we have a plausible illustration of how the mechanics of IDF might uniquely threaten human freedom, even though the bare existence of IDF cannot.

The observation that the mechanics of IDF may uniquely threaten freedom even though IDF itself cannot tells us something important about a promising future direction for discussion of freedom and foreknowledge. For, surprisingly, the arguments most commonly forwarded to demonstrate the incompatibility of IDF and human freedom – arguments like that presented in section one – do not say a word about the mechanics of IDF. They attempt to show that IDF is incompatible with human freedom quite apart from any claims about the mechanics of IDF. Yet, if the argument of this paper is sound, this approach fails to capitalize on an important facet of what is most pressing concerning the relationship between IDF and human freedom. For, whether IDF is compatible with human freedom depends at least in significant part on the sort of mechanics required for the existence of IDF. As we have seen, IDF itself cannot uniquely threaten human freedom; but, the conditions required for the existence of IDF – the conditions which account for the mechanics of IDF – may indeed uniquely threaten human freedom. Thus, it would be profitable for future discussion of freedom and foreknowledge to focus squarely on this very issue. Instead of focusing on arguments which would attempt to establish the incompatibility of freedom and IDF independently of engaging the question of the mechanics of IDF,

philosophers of religion would be well-served to focus on an argument which might attempt to establish the incompatibility of IDF and human freedom by focusing on this very question about the mechanics of IDF.

One way to help focus discussion of freedom and foreknowledge on the mechanics of IDF would therefore be to provide an argument for the incompatibility of freedom and foreknowledge which would require the compatibilist about freedom and foreknowledge to pursue further work on the mechanics of IDF in order to adequately respond to it. In this vein, I propose the following dilemma (though of course I am not *defending* this dilemma here – I am simply offering it for the purpose of guiding future discussion of IDF and human freedom). Either the mechanics whereby IDF is supposed to be achieved is some mechanics for achieving foreknowledge with which human beings are familiar or it is not. If the mechanics whereby IDF is supposed to be achieved is a mechanics for achieving foreknowledge with which human beings are familiar, then this mechanics uniquely threatens human freedom. For, the only way of achieving foreknowledge – particularly, foreknowledge of distantly future events – with which we are familiar involves believing claims about the future on the basis of what is known about the past and laws of nature. And, if this is how IDF is achieved, then we will have a significant threat to human freedom because the mechanics required for IDF will require that human actions are causally determined.¹⁶ If, however, the mechanics whereby IDF is supposed to be achieved is not a mechanics for securing foreknowledge with which humans are familiar, then we cannot be confident that it indeed makes possible IDF. For, we will not be in a position to judge whether it is a mechanics which can secure foreknowledge. Thus, either the mechanics whereby IDF is supposed to be achieved is one which uniquely threatens human freedom or it is not one which we can be confident makes possible IDF. Either way, we cannot be confident that IDF is compatible with human freedom.¹⁷

The argument challenges the compatibilist about freedom and foreknowledge to articulate and defend an account of the mechanics of IDF with two central features. First, the account must provide a mechanics for divine forebelief with which we humans are familiar enough to make an informed judgment about whether it can in fact secure

¹⁶ At least, human actions will be the causal consequences of the past and laws of nature. It may be that these laws are indeterministic.

¹⁷ For a related presentation of such an argument from the mechanics of foreknowledge, see (Byerly forthcoming b).

foreknowledge. Second, the conditions required by the account must not uniquely threaten human freedom. Articulating and defending such an account of the mechanics of IDF is extremely difficult, and very few have taken up the task.¹⁸ Instead, what one typically finds compatibilists about freedom and foreknowledge doing is defending one or another response to arguments for the incompatibility of IDF and human freedom like the argument discussed in section one of this paper which don't require the compatibilist to say anything about the mechanics of IDF. As has been argued here, there is a more interesting and important challenge for the compatibilist to address. That is the challenge of providing a mechanics for divine foreknowledge with the features articulated here. My hope is that the argument for the incompatibility of freedom and foreknowledge articulated here could serve as a helpful starting point for this promising direction of future discussion in the freedom-foreknowledge debate.

CONCLUSION

The main goal of this paper has been to argue that infallible divine foreknowledge cannot uniquely threaten human freedom. This is because infallible divine foreknowledge by itself cannot make an essential contribution to an explanation for why our actions are not up to us. Yet, this fact alone does not show that infallible divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible. For, it may be that the mechanics whereby infallible divine foreknowledge is achieved uniquely threatens human freedom. This paper has suggested that future discussion of freedom and foreknowledge focus on this latter issue, and has provided an argument which will help to lay a foundation for such discussion.

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¹⁸ The primary attempt to do so is of course the Molinist attempt discussed earlier. This attempt, however, arguably fails. See, again, (Adams 1977).

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