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### Theological Fatalism as an Aporetic Problem

David P. Hunt  
Whittier College

Much has been written about the “problem of theological fatalism”—the dilemma posed by the apparent conflict between divine foreknowledge and human freedom—but little attention has been paid to the *nature* of the problem generated by this conflict. Perhaps that’s because the problem’s nature seems obvious: what’s at stake is either divine foreknowledge or human freedom, and most theists, at least, want to affirm both. But there may be more than one problem here. The nature of the problem of evil, for example, might seem equally obvious: what’s at stake is either the full “three-omnis” conception of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, or the evident fact of evil, and theists, at least, are loath to deny either. But the problem of evil is clearly problematic in a number of different ways.

There is, for example, the “practical” problem of evil, faced by its victims, and the companion “pastoral” problem of evil, confronting all those in a position to minister to the victims (a test notoriously flunked by Job’s three friends). Even if one’s interest is more theoretical, there are still multiple ways the problem can be understood. Particularly useful for present purposes is the distinction Marilyn Adams makes between taking the problem of evil *atheistically*—i.e., as offering “a positive disproof of divine existence”—and taking it *aporetically*—i.e., as “generating a puzzle” for the one who accepts its premises.<sup>1</sup> Adams elaborates on this distinction as follows:

When, in the history of philosophy, a number of *prima facie* plausible premisses seem to generate a problematic conclusion, the resultant argument can be said to formulate a problem, which can be dealt with in various ways. One can simply accept the argument as sound and its surprising conclusion as true. Alternatively, one may remain confident that the conclusion is false but see the argument as creating a difficulty for anyone who rejects it: that of explaining how the *prima facie* plausible premisses are not all so acceptable, the inferences not so evident, as they seem. To respond the latter way is to take the argument aporetically, as generating a puzzle. What is important to note is that the same argument can be taken in both directions. Sometimes consensus gathers around one reading—as when most philosophers took Zeno’s paradoxes and Parmenides’ arguments against the possibility of change as aporetic. In other cases, both usages persist, but one predominates—as in the case of sceptical arguments about the existence of other minds and/or a physical world, about the possibility of knowledge, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Given this distinction, can the argument for theological fatalism also be “taken in both directions,” either atheistically or aporetically? And if so, are there considerations that favor one direction over the other?

This is the question I want to address in the present paper. Before taking it up, however, I would like us to think a bit about Adams' example of a problem around which philosophical consensus has formed: the Achilles paradox of Zeno. Call this the problem of "testudine unpassability" (not to be confused with impassibility!). The relevant facts about this famous problem are these: (1) An argument is given, starring a tortoise (adj. *testudine*), renowned for its slowness, and Achilles, Homer's "fleetest of the Achaeans." (2) The argument's conclusion is that Achilles can't pass the tortoise. (3) It's surprisingly hard to say exactly where the argument goes wrong. (The details of the argument don't matter, so long as it's hard to say where it goes wrong.)

We've got a situation here. Let's review three possible problems of testudine unpassability to which this situation might give rise. (That's one more than Adams identified, but the first two correspond to her atheistic problem of evil.)

The first problem I will call the "parochial problem." This is the problem the argument poses for someone trying to determine *whether the argument succeeds*, where the person's interest in this question is limited to a parochial concern with its implications for Achilles and/or the tortoise. For a classical scholar who has made her name arguing that there *was* an Achilles whom Homer memorialized more or less accurately in *The Iliad*, the argument might pose an *Achillean* problem of testudine unpassability, inasmuch as it challenges one of Achilles' distinguishing attributes and perhaps even his very existence; similarly, a herpetologist concerned that the argument threatens well-established facts about the torpidity of tortoises might confront a *testudine* problem of testudine unpassability. Both the Achillean and the testudine problems of testudine unpassability are parochial problems, and they can be solved by any maneuver that allows Achilles and/or the tortoise to escape the argument. The parochial problem of testudine unpassability may seem silly, but it will prove instructive when we turn to the problem of theological fatalism.

The second problem of testudine unpassability can be called the "metaphysical problem." Like the parochial problem, this problem arises for someone trying to determine *whether the argument succeeds*, but in this case the person realizes that what's at stake is much bigger than the existence of Achilles or the passability of tortoises: it's the reality of motion itself. *That* problem has nothing essentially to do with Achilles or a tortoise, and it can't be solved by revising their attributes. The metaphysical problem is solved only by determining that the argument as given does *not* succeed (where it was a live question whether it succeeds), or by determining that it *does* succeed and taking stock of the tectonic adjustments to one's conceptual framework that such a determination calls for. Even for those unmoved by the metaphysical problem of testudine unpassability, it shouldn't be dismissed as a silly problem, unless one thinks that Zeno and Parmenides are silly.

Finally, there is the "aporetic problem": the problem, as Adams noted, that most philosophers think is actually raised by Zeno's argument for testudine unpassability. This consensus presumably rests on something like the following judgments:

1. There's something wrong with the argument. (I haven't formulated the argument, but this will be true no matter how it is formulated.)

2. We're within our epistemic rights in believing that there's something wrong with the argument, even if we don't know, and perhaps have no idea, *what* is wrong with it.

3. The sense that there must be something wrong with the argument rests in part on our conviction that the argument's conclusion is false. (I assume that's the point Diogenes the Cynic was making when, according to Simplicius, he stood up and walked around in response to Zeno's arguments.)

4. But it doesn't rest *simply* on the falsity of the conclusion. Perhaps there are arguments that could persuade us, contrary to our antecedent beliefs about Achilles, that he couldn't pass a tortoise. But surely *this* argument (pick your favorite formulation) can't do that.

5. The problem posed by the argument cannot be solved by revising one's conception of the argument's *dramatis personae*. Achillean revisionism ("perhaps Achilles was a quadriplegic and this 'fleetest of the Achaeans' stuff was Homer's little joke") simply removes Achilles from complicity in the problem; the same goes for testudine revisionism ("maybe this was a super-tortoise"! ). The problem is easily reinstated by substituting Hermes (or Usain Bolt) for Achilles, or a snail or glacier for the tortoise. Zeno's argument constitutes a thought-experiment, and its terms can be *stipulated*.

6. In sum, the argument presents a puzzle, not a serious brief on behalf of testudine unpassability. (When Diogenes walked around, he did not thereby *refute* Zeno's argument, but he did demonstrate grounds for thinking the argument to be aporetic.)

Understood aporetically, the solution to the problem involves discovering how best to rethink our assumptions or sharpen our conceptual tools so we don't fall prey to the argument. *Note that a solution to the aporetic problem will also dissolve the parochial and the metaphysical problems.* If the suspicion that the problem is aporetic is confirmed by the discovery of a bona fide mistake in the argument on which the problem rests, then of course the argument no longer provides any reason to revise the attributes of Achilles or the tortoise: if we've got Achilles or tortoises wrong, it will be for some reason other than the one supplied by the argument for testudine unpassability. And of course nothing will remain of the metaphysical problem either, if the aporetic problem is genuine and a solution to it is found.

The parochial and metaphysical problems are both "atheistic," in the sense that, for each problem, there is something the reality of which is genuinely called into question; they just differ in the scope of their concern (and consequently differ in the solutions that would count as addressing the concern). The aporetic problem, on the other hand, agrees with the metaphysical problem that nonparochial interests are threatened, but it disagrees with both the metaphysical and the parochial problem about whether the threat to those interests is a live one; the solution to the aporetic problem (assuming it is found) will leave those interests intact, because it will deflate the pretensions of the argument that threatened them.

Consider now the problem of theological fatalism. Here are three facts about this problem that parallel the three salient facts about testudine unpassability: (1) An argument is

given, starring God, an eternally existent and infallibly omniscient being, and A, a presumptively free action performed by a human being we'll call 'Sue'. (2) The argument's conclusion is that A isn't performed freely. (3) It isn't easy to see where the argument might go wrong. This time I will provide a formulation of the argument, one that strikes me as perspicuous. Letting T3 be the time at which Sue performs A, T2 a time prior to Sue's birth, and T1 any time prior to T2,

- (1) It is true at T1 that Sue will do A at T3. (The Omnitemporality of Truth)
- (2) God knows at T1 that Sue will do A at T3. (Divine Eternity and Omniscience)
- (3) God believes at T1 that Sue will do A at T3. (Analysis of Knowledge: *X knows that p* entails *X believes that p*)
- (4) It is accidentally necessary at T2 that God believed at T1 that Sue will do A at T3. (Necessity of the Past)
- (5) It is accidentally necessary at T2 that Sue will do A at T3. (Divine Infallibility, Transfer of Necessity Principle)
- (6) Sue cannot refrain from doing A at T3. (Incompatibilist Analysis of "Can")
- (7) Sue does not do A at T3 *freely*. (Principle of Alternate Possibilities)

The same argument can be given for any human being, action, and time. So no one ever does anything freely, given the argument's assumptions about God.<sup>3</sup>

It isn't hard to distinguish three possible problems of theological fatalism that might be raised by this argument, paralleling the three possible problems of testudine unpassability we just identified.

In the first place, there is a "parochial problem" confronting anyone trying to determine *whether the argument succeeds*, where this person's primary interest is in the argument's implications for God or human beings. (If that doesn't seem like a very parochial interest, treat 'parochial problem' as a name rather than a description!) For theists the argument poses a *theological* problem of theological fatalism, inasmuch as it challenges some of the defining attributes of the theistic God, thereby challenging the very existence of God. For Sue and other members of her species it might pose an *anthropological* problem of theological fatalism, inasmuch as it threatens humans' self-conception, not to mention the possibility of human deliberation and moral responsibility. The theological and anthropological problems of theological fatalism can be solved by any maneuver that allows God and/or human beings to escape the argument—e.g., by reconceiving God's attributes so that he's no longer complicit in the problem. If the only problem raised by the argument is the one it poses for God or human beings, the problem is solved once it's shown that the argument gets God or humans wrong.

In the second place, it is possible to identify a "metaphysical problem" of theological fatalism that is distinct from the parochial problem. Whether or not the original argument constitutes a thought-experiment (and the keen interest in the argument shown by nontheists like

John Martin Fischer suggests that it can be treated as such<sup>4</sup>), it is easily transformed into a thought-experiment. Suppose the argument doesn't apply to God, because God isn't infallibly omniscient, or doesn't exist. Then formulate the argument in terms of a character *Gox* who is stipulated to be infallibly omniscient, etc. Or suppose that the argument is wrong about human beings, for roughly the reasons that Derk Pereboom gives. It's a mistake to think that human beings, prior to the introduction of God's supposedly freedom-annihilating foreknowledge, are presumptively free. They *aren't* free, but the reason they aren't free is empirical. Genuine free agency requires something like libertarian agent-causation, and libertarian agent-causation is coherent; it's exemplifiable. It's just that there are good scientific reasons for thinking that it's not exemplified by human beings.<sup>5</sup> So the argument gets human beings wrong, but the problem can be reinstated by substituting the foreknown actions of other possible agents who are stipulated to be libertarian agent-causes (perhaps God's own future actions could play this role). The metaphysical problem, in short, arises for anyone trying to determine *whether the argument succeeds*, where the person understands the argument to challenge the compatibility of infallible omniscience (whether or not *God* is infallibly omniscient) and free agency (whether or not *human beings* are free agents). The metaphysical problem is solved only by determining that the argument as given does *not* succeed (where it was a live question whether it succeeds), or by determining that it *does* succeed and making the requisite adjustments, if any, to one's metaphysics—e.g., by concluding that infallible forebelief, or libertarian agency, or even future contingency itself, are impossible.

Finally, there is the “aporetic problem,” where the argument presents a puzzle to be solved, not a serious brief on behalf of theological fatalism. Unlike solutions to the parochial and the metaphysical problems, the solution to this problem requires that we figure out which of the unexamined assumptions we're bringing to the argument is responsible for its seductive allure. *Note that a solution to the aporetic problem will also dissolve the parochial and the metaphysical problems.* If the suspicion that the problem is aporetic is confirmed by the identification of a bona fide mistake in the argument on which the problem rests, then of course the argument no longer supports any “parochial” revisions to the attributes of God or of human beings; there may be excellent reasons for undertaking revisions of either sort, but the argument for theological fatalism won't be among them. The metaphysical problem will also collapse, on the same grounds.

Why think that the problem of theological fatalism should be taken aporetically? I don't believe that the answer is as obvious as it is in the case of testudine unpassability. The parochial problem, whether in its theological or its anthropological versions, is far from silly, and the metaphysical problem may strike many as genuine—certainly in contrast to the metaphysical problem of testudine unpassability, whose appeal is limited to potential Parmenideans. Nevertheless, a good case can be made for the aporetic problem of theological fatalism.

The fact that some problems are legitimately construed as aporetic doesn't give us a get-out-of-jail-free card that can be played whenever we don't like an argument and can't be bothered refuting it; there are conditions that have to be met. As we saw in the case of testudine unpassability, a problem can be taken aporetically only insofar as we're plausibly within our epistemic rights in believing that there's something wrong with the argument, even if we don't know, and perhaps have no idea, *what* is wrong with it. When it comes to incompatibility

arguments like the one for theological fatalism, there are basically two sources from which such an epistemic right might spring. The first is where one is epistemically entitled to affirm each of the putatively incompatible terms of the argument, and on that basis claims an epistemic right to hold that they *can't* be incompatible and that the argument must therefore be mistaken. Theists who treat the problem of evil aporetically often do so because they regard this first condition as satisfied.<sup>6</sup> The second is where the argument itself raises suspicions, quite apart from any antecedent commitment one might have to any of the allegedly incompatible elements, and (as a check on abuse) the suspicions aren't so vague that they can't be articulated—to invoke an epistemic right here, one should be able to say *something* about why *that* argument can't do *that* job. The consensus that the problem of testudine unpassability is aporetic rests to one degree or another on both of these conditions being satisfied.

I don't myself find the first condition a sufficient basis for regarding the problem of theological fatalism as aporetic, because my epistemic right to both infallible foreknowledge and free agency just isn't strong enough. Start with the latter. Free will remains a mystery, to quote the title of an article by another contributor to this volume,<sup>7</sup> and serious arguments have been offered for the conclusion that it's not just mysterious but incoherent.<sup>8</sup> I'm not so far persuaded by such arguments, and I remain committed to free agency of an agent-causal source-incompatibilist variety. But that commitment isn't luminous enough to stand in judgment of the argument, as it would need to be for me to regard the problem (on that basis) as aporetic; the arguments finally stand in judgment of it. And I feel even less entitled to play the aporia card when it comes to infallible foreknowledge. As a thoughtful theist I am comfortable invoking an epistemic right to perfect being theism, given the central role it plays in my conceptual scheme. But the problem of theological fatalism offers the classical theist maneuvering room that is unavailable when it comes to the problem of evil. If infallible foreknowledge and free agency are incompatible, there is no world in which they are coinstantiated, and hence no being in whom they are co-present. So God must lack one of these great-making properties, but this doesn't disqualify him as the greatest conceivable being, since a greater being, endowed with this lacked property, would be incoherent. (If push came to shove, I would hold onto God's free agency and jettison infallible foreknowledge in favor of a maximal cognitive excellence that excludes knowledge of future contingents—the so-called “narrow road” openism, to use Dale Tuggy's term, endorsed by William Hasker, Peter van Inwagen, and Richard Swinburne.<sup>9</sup>) Since I can remain a perfect being theist if the argument for theological fatalism succeeds, my epistemic right to perfect being theism does not entitle me to treat the argument as aporetic.

That leaves the second condition under which the argument can be approached aporetically, and this one seems to me to be satisfied. I'll content myself with one intuition pump and two arguments from authority (the two authorities on this subject than whom none greater exists).

Here's the intuition pump. Suppose that Sue's performance of action A satisfies to the highest degree *your* favorite criteria for free action, whatever they may be. If *anything* is a free action, *that* is. Throw in everything but the kitchen sink: Sue does A willingly; her will to do A doesn't flout any of Sue's second-order desires; Sue can abstain from A-ing should she choose to do so; Sue is not acting under coercion or duress; A is not causally determined by events prior to Sue's birth; Sue is not acting in ignorance of relevant circumstances; and so on. Now add one

more condition: before Sue was born, God (or Gox, for that matter) infallibly believed that Sue will perform A at T3. How could *that* additional condition have as a consequence that A isn't an instance of free agency? There are conditions that clearly *would* warrant such a reassessment—for example, if it were added that Sue was acting under the influence of drugs or post-hypnotic suggestion, or controlled by Martians via a chip implanted in her brain, or connected by tiny invisible wires to Van Inwagen's demonic piano player.<sup>10</sup> But the idea that the mere presence of an infallible foreknower could make this kind of difference is deeply puzzling. We have good reason to suspect that the argument goes wrong, even if we're unable to determine exactly *where* it goes wrong. It's reasonable, in other words, to take the argument aporetically.

Now for the two authorities. The first is St. Augustine, for whom the argument certainly could have posed a “parochial” –in particular, a *theological*—problem, had he chosen to take it that way. But in *On Free Choice of the Will* III.3 we find Augustine instead expressing his confidence that God's “foreknowledge does not take away my power” on the grounds that “it is all the more certain that I will have that power, since he whose foreknowledge never errs foreknows that I will have it.” How then could the argument possibly succeed? This aporetic characterization of the problem reflects not only Augustine's theological commitments—his policy of believing first and understanding later (I.2)—but the inherent implausibility of what the theological fatalist is trying to demonstrate. Many commentators have thought that Augustine must be offering his *solution* to the problem in chapter 3, because it ends with Augustine's interlocutor, Evodius, declaring, “I no longer deny that whatever God foreknows must come to be, and that he foreknows our sins in such a way that our will still remains free in us and lies in our power.” But this is quite impossible, since the next chapter begins with Evodius's doubts unresolved:

Of course I do not dare deny any of these points. Yet I still cannot see how God's foreknowledge of our sins can be reconciled with our free choice in sinning. God must, we admit, be just and have foreknowledge. But I would like to know by what justice God punishes sins which must be; or how it is that they do not have to be, when He foreknows that they will be; or why anything which is necessarily done in His creation is not to be attributed to the Creator. (III.4)

Either Evodius has already forgotten what was just accomplished in chapter 3, or the accomplishments of that chapter leave the problem of theological fatalism still in place. There can be little doubt that the latter possibility is the correct one, given the reply Augustine makes to Evodius's renewed query in chapter 4. Rereading Evodius's apparent capitulation at the end of chapter 3 in light of the continuing discussion in chapter 4 makes it clear that Evodius is not thereby declaring the problem solved, but simply admitting its aporetic nature: the two poles of the dilemma (divine foreknowledge and free will) *are* compatible with each other after all, but *how* they can be compatible is another matter altogether.

The second authority is Nelson Pike, whose restatement of the argument for theological fatalism in 1965 was largely responsible for its formidable reputation today. Pike began his famous paper by observing that “the claim that if God is omniscient, no human action is voluntary . . . seems intuitively false. Surely, given only a doctrine describing God's *knowledge*, nothing about the voluntary status of human actions will follow.”<sup>11</sup> And yet Pike thought he

could formulate a pretty impressive argument for the conclusion that it *does* follow. This is a surprising result, quite apart from any theological commitments one might have. Whether or not Pike himself regarded the problem as aporetic is hard to say. His occasional interventions in the ensuing debate were dedicated to showing that a proposed solution didn't work, not to showing that the argument finally succeeds. It's true that he never proposed a solution of his own; but it's equally true that he never pronounced the original intuition—that the denial of voluntary agency shouldn't follow simply from a thesis about God's knowledge—a mistake, as it would have to be if the argument for theological fatalism got things right.<sup>12</sup>

Appeals *ad verecundiam* don't establish truth, and intuition pumps depend on the pumpability of the target audience's intuitions. But I don't aim to *prove* that theological fatalism poses an aporetic problem, only that it can legitimately be approached aporetically. Suppose that's granted.<sup>13</sup> What actual difference might this make to proposed solutions to the problem? One difference is that some steps in the argument will be less promising than others as sources of the problem.

Philosophers are deeply divided on the question of future-contingent truth. Some (I confess to being one of them) regard their existence as virtually a datum; it's genuinely inconceivable how the argument's supposition that Sue A's at T3 can be accepted without (1) being true. For such philosophers, (1) is simply nonnegotiable; if the argument is aporetic, its flaw must lie elsewhere. Others regard it as equally luminous that there are no future-contingent truths, a position that may itself rest on some other luminous insight, such as the truth of presentism. Anyone coming to the argument with an antecedent commitment to the denial of future-contingent truth will of course reject (1). But this won't constitute a solution to a problem, let alone an aporetic problem, any more than the argument

- (i) There are married bachelors
- (ii) If there are married bachelors, then Sue does not do A at T3 freely  
So Sue does not do A at T3 freely

raises a "problem" that is to be "solved" by denying the first premise. Finally, there are those outside the two hard-line camps who are willing to entertain step (1) but do not find the denial of future-contingent truth absolutely unthinkable. Could the argument, if taken aporetically, provide a reason for them to deny (1)? Aristotle seems to have thought that the argument for *logical* fatalism constituted an *aporia* best addressed by denying future-contingent truth.<sup>14</sup> Aristotle was mistaken about this: there are other flaws in the argument for logical fatalism that he failed to detect, so that argument cannot provide a good reason to reject future-contingent truth. But the argument for theological fatalism is stronger at just those points where the argument for logical fatalism is weak, so there isn't a comparable ground for thinking that the former argument cannot provide a reason to reject step (1). This argument, however, unlike the argument for logical fatalism, provides no reason to reject future-contingent truths apart from their being foreknown by God. So far as this argument is concerned, then, there is no problem with future-contingent truths until they are made available to divine omniscience. Their availability can be blocked in two ways: by denying their truth, or by accepting their truth but denying the logical possibility of knowing them. These are the two responses that open theists have made to the argument. One of these responses might be preferable to the other on one



ground or another, but it doesn't seem that the argument *itself* could provide a reason to deny the truth rather than the knowability of future-contingents.

This brings us to (2), which has been denied on two grounds, neither of which addresses the aporetic problem. One ground is the “narrow road openness” of Hasker, Van Inwagen and Swinburne, mentioned earlier, on which God does not know all truths because some of them—the future-contingent truths—are logically unknowable. For narrow roaders, the argument for theological fatalism is supposed to *show* that future-contingent truths are unknowable, even by God, and it can show this only if the argument's no-freedom conclusion *follows from* the assumption that God foreknows future-contingent truths. But this is exactly what those who regard the argument as aporetic will doubt. The other ground draws on the Boethian conception of God as existing eternally rather than in time; God knows eternally that Sue A's at T3, but because he does not exist at T1, he does not know at T1 that Sue will A at T3. Suppose Boethius is right about God. It's still subject to debate whether this helps with the argument. Some have maintained that, relative to the present, eternity is just as necessary as the past, so that the Boethian move makes no real difference at step (4): God's belief that Sue A's at T3 is accidentally necessary at T2 whether the belief is held at T1 or in timeless eternity.<sup>15</sup> Others have argued that God could cause tokens of his eternal knowledge to exist in time, and these might have all the freedom-annihilating power of divine foreknowledge.<sup>16</sup> But even if these challenges to the Boethian response to the problem could be overcome, it would be a response to the wrong problem. The Boethian move only addresses the parochial *theological* problem. A Boethian God would not be complicit in this problem, but the aporetic problem would remain, reformulated now as a thought-experiment involving Gox. There may be good reasons to think of God as timeless; I'm a Boethian myself.<sup>17</sup> But the problem of theological fatalism won't be one of those reasons.

Premise (3) is usually allowed to stand, but it's subject to the objection that divine knowledge, unlike human knowledge, is not carried by beliefs.<sup>18</sup> This could make a significant difference to the argument at step (4): while it's controversial whether (3) is a “soft fact” about the past relative to T2 (see the following paragraph), (2) is a paradigmatic soft fact about the past relative to T2, and soft facts about the past are not accidentally necessary. Unfortunately, this objection to (3), like the Boethian denial of (2), removes God from complicity in the problem by positing a special feature associated with *God*, leaving the aporetic problem intact.

The most popular proposal during the post-Pikean discussion of the argument, at least before the rise of open theism, has been the denial of (4) on the grounds that the Necessity of the Past does not apply to God's past beliefs about a time that is yet future. The Necessity of the Past governs so-called “hard facts” about the past, but not “soft facts” about the past; and (3), following a line first worked out by William Ockham, is a soft fact about the past relative to T2.<sup>19</sup> There are basically two kinds of reasons that have been offered for this Ockhamist claim about divine forebeliefs. One appeals to special features of the divine mind such that one and the same cognitive state at T1 can constitute the belief that X will A at T3, if X A's at T3, and constitute the belief that X will not A at T3, if X does not A at T3.<sup>20</sup> For example, if God's beliefs about the contingent future have wide content, they might count as different beliefs depending on how the future unfolds, just as a belief about water can be different depending on whether water is H<sub>2</sub>O or XYZ.<sup>21</sup> But if God's beliefs are special, and they're soft because of this

special feature, then this doesn't solve the aporetic problem any more than it's solved by the Boethian stratagem of invoking God's special status with respect to time. The other reason that has been offered on behalf of the Ockhamist claim is that the beliefs in question are soft *because* they entail truth; so even Gox's corresponding beliefs would be soft.<sup>22</sup> This version of the Ockhamist strategy would address the aporetic problem, if only it were defensible. But it's not. Given Divine Infallibility, (3) entails that Sue will do A at T3; on the current proposal, then, (3) is a soft fact about the past relative to T2, so the necessity claim in (4) is unwarranted. But given Causal Determinism, the conjunction of the Laws with the complete state of the universe at T1 also entails that Sue will do A at T3;<sup>23</sup> on the current proposal, then, this conjunction is a soft fact about the past relative to T2, so that Causal Determinism, far from legitimating the necessity claim in (4), actually undermines it. Something has clearly gone wrong here, and not just for the *tu quoque* reason that most of those endorsing the Ockhamist strategy are incompatibilists about free will and causal determinism.<sup>24</sup>

If the Transfer of Necessity Principle legitimating (5) is in fact false, this might dispel the aporetic problem generated by the argument. But the kinds of necessity that don't transfer seem relevantly different from the Necessity of the Past, and there are positive reasons for thinking that the Necessity of the Past *does* transfer.<sup>25</sup> So denying this justification for (5) is not very promising. The other way to resist (5) is to reject Divine Infallibility, but this is not an attractive move theologically—much less so than limiting the extent of divine foreknowledge, as open theists have urged. But it would also offer a solution *only* to the theological problem, leaving intact the aporetic problem (in which of course God would no longer be complicit). What would be needed, if the aporetic problem is to be addressed, is a principled reason to reject the very possibility of infallible beliefs when they concern future-contingents. (This would prevent the argument from being reinstated with the help of Gox.) Perhaps the argument itself provides such a reason, but only if every other step in the argument passes muster.

This brings us to the last two steps of the argument, which I would like to consider together. If the argument succeeds up through (5), then before Sue is even born it is already the case that all accessible futures include her A-ing at T3; no accessible future includes her not A-ing at T3. If it is nevertheless possible to attach some (compatibilist) sense to the idea that Sue *can* still refrain from A-ing at T3, then it won't be possible to get to (7) via (6) (because (6) will be false), but it might be possible to get to (7) directly from (5). That Sue isn't free in A-ing at T3 if there are *no accessible futures in which she doesn't A* at T3 (which is how things are if (5) is true) seems no less plausible than that Sue isn't free in A-ing at T3 if she *can't refrain from A*-ing at T3 (which is how things are if (6) is true). Moreover, there are good reasons to think that (7) fails to follow whether or not (6) is false.

The Principle of Alternate Possibilities (or 'PAP') on which (7) rests is a freedom version of a principle of moral responsibility one simple formulation of which goes like this:

PAP A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise.

Harry Frankfurt began his well-known critique of this principle by noting that it's the common possession of compatibilists and incompatibilists alike and "has generally seemed so

overwhelmingly plausible that some philosophers have even characterized it as an *a priori* truth.”<sup>26</sup> Frankfurt’s rejection of PAP rested on a counterexample involving an agent, Jones, and a counterfactual intervener, Black. Jones decides to perform an action (say, kill Smith) and follows through on this decision, under conditions that would ordinarily make him morally responsible for his action if anyone is ever morally responsible for an action. But lurking in the background is Black, equipped with a sci-fi device programmed in such a way that the following are both true:

- (A) If Jones were going to decide to kill Smith, the device would leave Jones alone.
- (B) If Jones were *not* (otherwise) going to decide to kill Smith, the device would intervene to bring it about that Jones *does* decide to kill Smith.

In Frankfurt’s example it’s the antecedent of (A) that happens to be true, so the device leaves Jones alone and he decides on his own; but because (B) is true (not its antecedent, but the entire counterfactual conditional), Jones can’t do otherwise than decide to kill Smith. Frankfurt thought it obvious that Black and his device, while successfully stripping Jones of alternative courses of action, left Jones’s moral responsibility intact, for they “played no role at all in leading him to act as he did,” “could have been subtracted from the situation without affecting what happened or why it happened in any way,” “irrelevant to the problem of accounting for [Jones’s] action,” and do “not help in any way to understand either what made him act as he did or what, in other circumstances, he might have done.”<sup>27</sup> If Frankfurt is right, PAP is false, and the reasons why PAP is false are equally reasons why its freedom version is false. So (7) does not follow from the argument.

Frankfurt’s argument, with this counterexample at its heart, has spawned an extensive debate. An important vulnerability of Frankfurt’s original counterexample, on which many critics have fastened, is that even if the counterfactual intervener succeeds in stripping Jones of any alternatives to deciding to kill Smith, Jones retains a plethora of other alternatives, some of which are arguably relevant to his moral responsibility for deciding to kill Smith. These include, most notably, his exhibiting or not exhibiting the “prior sign” that determines whether the counterfactual intervener remains quiescent and allows him to decide on his own, and even his deciding or not deciding *at the time that he decides* (though the counterfactual intervener can ensure that he decides to kill Smith at the next instant). Improved counterexamples have been designed to get around these problems, but so long as the new counterexamples contain residual alternatives of one sort or another, PAP defenders can argue that these are sufficient to satisfy PAP, or some improvement on PAP that identifies more perspicuously the alternative possibilities that are essential to free agency and moral responsibility.

The divine foreknowledge scenario, however, is immune to this problem. Infallible foreknowledge eliminates *all* alternative possibilities, leaving none about which it is possible to debate whether they are “robust” or mere “flickers of freedom.” And it does so without jeopardizing the judgment that Sue is free in the sense required for moral responsibility. In divine foreknowledge cases as in Frankfurt’s original case, the conditions which eliminated the person’s alternatives “played no role at all in leading him to act as he did,” so that in their absence “[h]e would have acted the same.” This is why we continue to hold the agent morally

responsible in Frankfurt cases, even if we think his alternatives have been stripped, and it's why we should continue to regard the agent as free in the face of divine foreknowledge.

Augustine reached a similar conclusion in Book III, chapter 4, of *On Free Choice of the Will*, after he diagnosed the problem as aporetic in chapter 3:

Why cannot He justly punish what He does not force to be done, even though He foreknows it? Your recollection of events in the past does not compel them to occur. In the same way God's foreknowledge of future events does not compel them to take place. As you remember certain things that you have done and yet have not done all the things that you remember, so God foreknows all the things of which He Himself is the Cause, and yet He is not the Cause of all that He foreknows. (III.4)

Augustine reiterates this analysis in the *City of God* when he writes, "A man does not therefore sin *because* God foreknew that he would sin" (V.10). Augustine's solution to the problem of theological fatalism appears to make him a Frankfurtian *avant la lettre*, with one major difference: instead of developing independent reasons for doubting PAP, such as the ones Frankfurt derives from his counterexample, and then using them to rebut the argument for theological fatalism at step (7), Augustine comes to doubt PAP *because* the argument for theological fatalism strips Sue of alternatives in such a way that her free agency is unaffected. In effect, a foreknowledge scenario is itself a perfect Frankfurt counterexample.

If Augustine is right about this, then the argument for theological fatalism—considered as a pure thought-experiment, detached from any "parochial" concern with God and human beings—provides a good reason to reject (7). I think that this is the most satisfying response to the aporetic problem; it gets right to the heart of the puzzle over how mere foreknowledge could possibly undermine free agency.

The only way this conclusion can be resisted, I believe, is if the divine foreknowledge scenario (featuring God *or* Gox) involves some conceptual incoherence. This possibility can be handled by employing a dilemma. Either the argument succeeds up through (6), or it doesn't. Suppose it doesn't succeed up through (6); then it doesn't succeed up through (7), and the argument fails, full stop. (That's the trivial horn of the dilemma.) Suppose then that it does succeed up through (6), so that Sue can't do otherwise *for those reasons*. Her situation going into (7) is that there are no accessible alternatives to her A-ing at T3, because God infallibly forebelieved that she will A at T3. That's entailed by the supposition that (1)-(6) are acceptable. But then Sue is the star of a perfect Frankfurt counterexample, and this counterexample is conceptually coherent (if it weren't, we'd be thrown back on the first horn of the dilemma). This means that PAP is false, and the move from (6) to (7) is blocked. So if the argument succeeds up through (6), it fails at (7). On both horns of the dilemma the argument fails.

This provides final vindication of the judgment that the problem raised by the argument is aporetic, and that no one should be persuaded by the argument that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See her introduction to *The Problem of Evil*, edited by Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup>The quoted passage is from her earlier “Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (April 1988), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup>This formulation is identical to the one I gave in my entry on the problem of divine foreknowledge in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>4</sup>Fischer is the editor of *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), for which he wrote a lengthy introduction, and articles on foreknowledge too numerous to mention.

<sup>5</sup>Derk Pereboom, *Living without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chapters 2-3.

<sup>6</sup>This seems to be Job’s position in the Bible. Confidence that the existence of God and the reality of evil are somehow consistent might (though it need not) be defended by an appeal to the “G.E. Moore shift” described by William Rowe (“The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979), pp. 335-41), or the “skeptical theism” of Stephen Wykstra (The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of ‘Appearance’,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984), pp. 63-93), William Alston (“The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), pp. 29-67), and Michael Bergmann (“Skeptical Theism and Rowe’s New Evidential Argument from Evil,” *Nous* 35 (2001), pp. 278-96).

<sup>7</sup>Peter van Inwagen, “Free Will Remains a Mystery,” in Robert Kane (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 158-77.

<sup>8</sup>Galen Strawson, e.g., has formulated an incoherence argument in a number of places, including *Freedom and Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) and “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility,” *Philosophical Studies* 75 (1994), pp. 5-24.

<sup>9</sup>Dale Tuggy, “Three Roads to Open Theism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (January 2007), pp. 28-51. Hasker endorses this position in *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 186-88; Van Inwagen in “What Does an Omniscient Being Know about the Future?” *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 216-230; and Swinburne in *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 22-26.

<sup>10</sup>Van Inwagen introduces the freakish demon on pp. 130-32 of *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

<sup>11</sup>Nelson Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action,” *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965), p. 27.

<sup>12</sup>Of course absence of evidence isn’t evidence of absence. But I have a further reason for thinking that Pike continued to find this original intuition compelling. Since it comes from a private conversation it is best buried in a footnote. At a dinner at John Fischer’s house about twenty-five years ago I asked Pike if he thought there was a solution to the problem. His reply: “When the final chapter is written, it will turn out that some conceptual infelicity, involving a mismatch between the modal resources brought to bear on the problem and the requirements for voluntary action we were trying to capture, was to blame.” At least I recollect his saying something to this effect—I didn’t have a tape recorder running! But it was clear to me from

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what he said that he thought the argument probably rested on a mistake and that the intuitive doubts he expressed at the beginning of his first article would be vindicated.

<sup>13</sup> Further argument that the problem is aporetic may be found in my “What *Is* the Problem of Theological Fatalism?” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (March 1998), pp. 17-30.

<sup>14</sup> *De Interpretatione* 9.

<sup>15</sup> See Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 60-63. Zagzebski suggests, however, that the Necessity of Eternity is not as obviously true as the Necessity of the Past. I think that’s right. The Boethian maintains that timeless belief is relevantly like present belief (God’s knowledge, Boethius writes, “views all things in the immediacy of its knowing as though they are happening in the present”), and present belief is not accidentally necessary.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Van Inwagen invokes a “Freedom-denying Prophetic Object” to argue against the Boethian solution in his “What Does an Omniscient Being Know about the Future?” *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ch. 10.

<sup>17</sup> I’m particularly fond of a reason offered by Linda Zagzebski: “the doctrine of timelessness . . . is simply more metaphysically exciting than the view that God is temporal” (*The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*, p. 65).

<sup>18</sup> William Alston, “Does God Have Beliefs?” *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), pp. 287-306.

<sup>19</sup> *Predestination, Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, ed. and trans. Marilyn McCord Adams & Norman Kretzmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).

<sup>20</sup> John Martin Fischer calls this the “Incompatibilist’s Constraint” in his “Freedom and Foreknowledge,” *Philosophical Review* 92 (1983), pp. 67-79.

<sup>21</sup> Eddy M. Zemach and David Widerker, “Facts, Freedom, and Foreknowledge,” *Religious Studies* 23 (1987), pp. 19-28.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Plantinga adopts this line in “On Ockham’s Way Out,” *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (July 1986), pp. 235-69. Here’s the relevant passage:

I am not endorsing a *criterion* for hard facthood; in particular I am not adopting an “entailment” criterion, according to which a fact about the past is a hard fact about the past if and only if it entails no proposition about the future. . . . What I *am* saying is this: No proposition that entails

(18) Paul will mow his lawn in 1999

is a hard fact about the past, because no such proposition is *strictly* about the past (p. 248).

This opens him to the charge I make in the remainder of the paragraph.

<sup>23</sup> I am following Peter Van Inwagen’s formulation in *An Essay on Free Will*, *op. cit.*, p. 65:

We may now define ‘determinism’. We shall apply this term to the conjunction of these two theses:

For every instant of time, there is a proposition that expresses the state of the world at that instant;

If *p* and *q* are any propositions that express the state of the world at some instants, then the conjunction of *p* with the laws of nature entails *q*.

<sup>24</sup> Plantinga also rejects (4) on the grounds that, because God exists in all possible worlds and is omniscient in all possible worlds, (1) and (3) are logically equivalent. This logical equivalence is exploited for a similar purpose in Ted A. Warfield, “Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom Are Compatible,” *Nous* 31 (1997), pp. 80-86. I respond to both Plantinga and Warfield

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in “The Compatibility of Divine Determinism and Human Freedom: A Modest Proposal,” *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (October 2002), pp. 485-502.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Slote, in “Selective Necessity and the Free Will Problem,” *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (January 1982), pp. 5-24, describes a kind of necessity, *nonaccidentality*, that isn’t closed under entailment. But the feature of nonaccidentality in virtue of which it violates Transfer is not possessed by the necessity of the past. Logical necessity is closed under entailment, and so is any necessity that can be modeled as truth in all logically possible worlds meeting a certain specification. But the necessity of the past can be modeled as truth in all logically possible worlds sharing the actual past. If  $p$  is true in all such worlds, and  $p$  entails  $q$ , then  $q$  is true in all such worlds.

<sup>26</sup> “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (December 1969), p. 829.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 836-7.

<sup>28</sup> The argument made here complements arguments I’ve made in a number of other places, including “On Augustine’s Way Out,” *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (January 1999), pp. 1-26, and “Freedom, Foreknowledge, and Frankfurt,” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities: Essays on the Importance of Alternative Possibilities*, eds. David Widerker & Michael McKenna (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2003), pp. 159-83.