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TWO PROBLEMS WITH KNOWING THE FUTURE

David P. Hunt

Knowledge is a good thing. But might it be one of those good things of which one can have too much? Perhaps so, if the knowledge in question is *foreknowledge*. Two concerns over excess foreknowledge have attracted particular attention in the literature. One is that holding a belief about how the future will turn out thereby excludes that portion of the future from becoming an object of the believer's own agency. The idea is that agency is a matter of *intentional* action, and such action — including activities, like deliberating and deciding, which are oriented toward the formation of intentions — is stultified by an antecedent belief about what one will do. If this is indeed the case, and impotence is an unacceptable price to pay for prescience, it is evidently possible for someone to have more knowledge than is good for him.¹ The other concern regarding foreknowledge is that there are circumstances in which it is incompatible with libertarian freedom. The circumstances in question are those in which the knower is *infallible*. The problem is that infallible knowledge rules out even the *possibility* of someone acting differently than he is known to act, while infallible *foreknowledge* rules out this possibility *in advance*. The latter, however, negates a crucial requirement of the libertarian conception of freedom; so if it is better that the universe

contain at least some (libertarian) freedom than that it contain an infallible knower who knows absolutely everything even before it happens, there are conditions under which someone might have more knowledge than it is good for anyone to have.²

Let us call the first of these concerns the "Problem of Agency" and the second the "Problem of Freedom." Assuming for the moment that both these concerns are legitimate (an assumption that will be questioned in due course), which concern is more serious? There is no simple answer to this question. The Problem of Freedom is at least potentially the more serious of the two, since an infallible foreknower curtails the (libertarian) freedom of anyone whose actions he foreknows, whereas the only intentionality that can be thwarted by such knowledge is his own (no matter what he foreknows about the actions of others). But in two other respects the Problem of Agency might appear the more formidable. In the first place, a loss of intentional agency would represent an incontestable change in someone's powers, whereas the denial of libertarian freedom might mean no change at all (if, as its critics maintain, such freedom is chimerical in any case). In the second place, attempts to predict the future are far more likely to provoke the Problem of Agency, since its triggering conditions operate at a lower threshold:

so long as a potential agent *thinks* that he knows what he will later do, the fact that his belief is fallible, irrational, or even false (any of which would neutralize the Problem of Freedom) is insufficient to mitigate the Problem of Agency. It is, for example, a problem we can imagine arising for human knowers (Oedipus, Macbeth, Billy Pilgrim).³

However one assesses the relative seriousness of these two problems, both arise in their strongest form when the foreknower is not a human agent but the theistic God, a being understood to be essentially omniscient, unerring, and sempiternal. If such a God exists and the two problems are genuine, then no one is ever (libertarianly) free, and the most powerful being in the universe is unable to make intentional use of his power. Because the theistic hypothesis makes the central issues so stark, it provides a particularly instructive context in which to examine these two problems, even if one's main interest lies in their implications for human belief and agency. It is not surprising, then, that this context is regularly invoked in discussions not only of the Problem of Freedom (where it is perhaps essential), but of the Problem of Agency as well. The fact that my chief interest in the present paper lies in the logical relationship between these two problems makes it particularly useful to locate them within the theistic environment in which both problems thrive. But this is not an essay in philosophical theology, and references to the Divine Mind will be limited to those which appear to illumine the human situation.⁴

The possibility that there might even *be* an interesting relationship between the Problem of Freedom and the Problem of Agency is one that goes virtually unrecognized in the literature. It is not hard to see why this is so: despite the fact that both

problems involve a threat that foreknowledge poses for agency, the brief comparison of these problems on the preceding page is sufficient to indicate the great differences in the range of that threat (the knower vs. others), the aspect of agency toward which the threat is directed (intentionality vs. metaphysical freedom), and the constituent of foreknowledge that is chiefly responsible for generating the threat (belief vs. infallible knowledge). These differences in the logic of the two problems help explain why they are invariably treated as distinct issues. My contention, however, is that these differences mask a more fundamental similarity, and that recognizing this similarity is the first step toward arriving at a proper estimation of these two problems. I begin with the Problem of Agency.

I

Why should one think that foreknowledge engenders a Problem of Agency in the first place? Perhaps it just seems obvious that it does; and admittedly there is a certain intuitive force to the idea that such agential phenomena as intending, deciding, and deliberating are rendered problematic by prior beliefs about what one will do. But it is far from clear just what this problem is, if indeed the intuition that there *is* a problem is even trustworthy. The following argument is supposed to demonstrate that this intuition is in fact sound. It is not the only such argument (two others will be mentioned shortly for sake of contrast); but it is the most important for the purposes of this paper.

There are two fundamental assumptions undergirding this argument. One is that the intentional stance required by genuine agency will be unachievable for an agent whenever she regards her performing a particular action on a particular occasion as already settled or fixed. The second is

that a self-reflective agent cannot hold a belief about what she will do at some later time without regarding her performing that action on that occasion as already settled or fixed. Given these two assumptions, theistic agency in particular would appear to be self-contradictory. Either God will perform a token of a particular action-type on a particular occasion, or He will not; being omniscient, moreover, He knows which it will be. But then His performing (or not performing) it must be regarded by Him as settled or fixed, leaving Him unable to assume with respect to it the intentional stance of a genuine agent. And the same result will of course follow for any beliefs which a *nonomniscient* agent is intemperate enough to form about her own future actions.⁵

Since any argument designed to legitimate the Problem of Agency must show how the gap between antecedent belief and agential impotence is to be spanned, we can distinguish such arguments according to the candidates they put forward for (b) in the series

- (a) *S* believes at t_0 that *P: I will A at t_1 .*
- (b) ?
- (c) *S* cannot at t_0 engage in acquiring the intention to *A* at t_1 .

Now the essential feature of the argument just adumbrated is the role played by the belief that the future is closed: the agent's belief that she will *A* at t_1 gives rise to the further belief that the future is closed with respect to her *A*-ing (or not *A*-ing) at t_1 . It is this latter belief which makes it impossible for her to engage in decision-making or intention-acquisition with respect to *A*-ing at t_1 . The linking step in this first argument, then, is

- (b₁) *S* believes at t_0 that *Q: my future is now closed with respect to A-ing at t_1 .*

Because the erstwhile agent is incapacitated by her own *belief* that the future is closed, let us call this argument the "Doxastic Argument." Before examining the argument more closely, it is worth contrasting its way of connecting (a) and (c) with two others.

The first alternative is to justify the connection by closely identifying the object of belief with the object of intention. Given this conflation of believing and intending, one might then argue that belief pre-empts intention-acquisition (deliberation, choice) because an agent cannot acquire (through the latter) what she already possesses (through the former). Let us call this the "Conflation Argument," and identify its candidate for (b) as

- (b₂) *S* has at t_0 a propositional attitude whose object is *P: I will A at t_1 .*

(b₂) is true in virtue of (a); but given the truth of (b₂), it might be thought that a necessary condition for forming the intention to *A* at t_1 can no longer be satisfied, since the formation of this intention involves acquisition of the very propositional object which (b₂) asserts to be already in *S*'s possession. It is this kind of argument which appears to lie behind, e.g., Carl Ginet's claim that "to believe that someone already knows what his future attempted action will be is to refuse to regard anything he does as having the point necessary to its being his *deciding* that he will attempt the action."⁶ Here decision-making is ruled out by the antecedent belief alone, regardless of what other beliefs the agent may have — in particular, regardless of whether these include (b₁), the belief that the future is closed.

Unfortunately, the Conflation Argument runs into trouble with its main assumption that the objects of intention may be assimilated to the objects of belief. Intending and believing must be distinguished in some

way, and it is hard to think how else this can be done except in terms of their objects or the attitudes directed toward those objects. If the difference lies in the propositional objects, then the assumption is simply false: the object of belief is the declarative proposition *I will do such-and-such*, while the object of intention is the optative proposition *would that I might do such-and-such*. The difference in mood undermines the claim that the objects are the same in such a way that someone who possesses the one cannot go on to acquire the other. But if the difference lies in the propositional attitudes, the fact (if it be a fact) that these attitudes are directed toward identical objects becomes irrelevant to the Conflation Argument's success; for having an attitude of belief toward the proposition *I will A at t_1* does not by itself settle the question whether one has or will come to have the quite different attitude of intention toward the same proposition. There is therefore no reason to think (c) true on the basis of (b₂). Human agents who anticipate their own actions might mistakenly conflate believing with intending and find their agency hamstrung as a result — but they might also recognize and avoid the mistake, and an infallible deity would surely do so.⁷

The second way of justifying the connection between antecedent belief and agential impotence without bringing in an explicit belief that the future is closed is to point to the conditions under which the agent might come to have a belief about his own future actions. Richard Taylor, for example, identifies these conditions as follows: "There seem, in fact, to be only these two ways in which one could know what he is going to do; namely, by *inferring* what he is going to do, or by *deciding* what he is going to do. In neither case can one deliberate about what he is going to do."⁸ In other words, (a) will be true only if

(b₃) It is the case at t_0 either that *S* has already acquired the intention to *A* at t_1 , or that *S* has inferred her *A*-ing at t_1 from other things that she believes at t_0 .

But (b₃) appears to entail (c): for *inference* rests on propositions whose truth is taken to be independent of what remains open for deliberation, while *intention* makes further deliberation impossible — at least until such time as the intention is withdrawn, at which point the foreknowledge based on that intention must also go.

This argument — call it the "Conditions Argument" — also founders on its main assumption. In the first place, there is no reason to think that *God* must acquire His knowledge of the future in either of these two ways; indeed, *God* is commonly thought of as knowing the future in the way that we know the present: not by deciding how to manipulate it, or by inference from other facts, but through a direct apprehension. In the second place, it is far from clear that *human* foreknowledge is confined to these two methods (assuming that time machines, tachyonic radios, crystal balls, or the like are conceptually possible); and even if it were so confined, *forebelief* is certainly not, and it is belief (rather than the other constituents of knowledge) which is relevant to the Problem of Agency. It is, for example, an empirical fact that people have acquired beliefs about their own future actions by reading tea leaves, frequenting fortunetellers, and having "precognitive" experiences; nor is there reason to doubt that such beliefs could be acquired as the result of hypnotism, a blow on the head, or the ministrations of a demented neurophysiologist. Because none of these beliefs is acquired under either of the conditions mentioned by Taylor, there is no reason (so far as the Conditions Argument goes) to think any of them acquired under conditions which nullify subsequent deliberation.

II

So much for the main alternatives to the Doxastic Argument. Since both suffer crippling defects, the Problem of Agency depends for its cogency on the Doxastic Argument. Thus motivated, let us return to that argument, considering first the move from (b₁) to (c) and its assumption that a potential agent is prevented from embarking on the path to intentional agency by the belief that her options are closed. The formation and maintenance of intentions may, of course, be thwarted in many ways: through death, ingestion of a desire-altering drug, and the like. But in a normally functioning rational agent it may also be thwarted by its lack of “fit” with other elements in the agent’s psychological economy. In particular, there is a practical inconsistency — an egregious lack of “fit” — between one’s acquiring the intention to perform a token of a particular action-type and the prior belief that one’s performing or not performing a token of that type is no longer an open issue. For if the action is believed to be already necessary, the intention to perform it must be judged superfluous; if the action is believed to be already impossible, the intention to perform it must be judged ineffective. In either case it is futile to engage in activities, such as deliberation and decision-making, whose whole point is the acquisition of intentions. Any rational agent who believed her options to be closed would therefore refrain from such activities (a failure to do so perhaps even being regarded as a mark of cognitive dysfunction).⁹ This claim may in fact admit of unusual exceptions; but as the exceptional cases yield unimpressive examples of agency, the argument is not best addressed by exploiting these exceptions, and I propose that the claim be accepted.

That leaves the move from (a) to (b₁). Why exactly must the belief that one’s

future is closed with respect to A-ing follow from the belief that one will A? One explanation might advert to the brute fact that believers are “wired” in such a way that the one belief cannot be held without the other. But this account is of dubious value on two grounds. In the first place, it is doubtful that anyone putting forward this claim is really in possession of the relevant information about how believers are “wired.” And in the second place, even if such information were available, so long as this stricture on belief is *merely* a brute fact, unsupported by any rationale for the stricture, it could have no bearing on agents with different “wiring.” This includes, most notably, God; but also human agents in some futuristic scenario who have been “rewired” by a neural technician (an operation which might appeal, e.g., to psychics who find their attempts at intentional agency hamstrung by precognitions of their own actions).

A better explanation is that this move, like the one from (b₁) to (c), is required by considerations of rational mental functioning. This is the approach taken by Tomis Kapitan, the principal proponent of the Doxastic Argument. His position turns on the claim that an agent’s believing an action to be an open alternative for her amounts to her believing it to be *contingent* in an appropriate sense, where the appropriate sense is contingency relative to the agent’s own (accessed) beliefs. If this claim is accepted, the Doxastic Argument goes through. For suppose that (a) is true, that is, that *S* believes at t_0 that *P*: *I will A at t_1* . Now clearly *P* is not contingent relative to itself; moreover, we can assume that a rational agent would not believe *P* to be contingent relative to itself (if necessary, eschewing such a belief can be made a requirement for rational agency). But then if *S* believes that *P*, it follows (if she is self-reflective as well as rational) that she

will not regard P as contingent relative to her own beliefs. According to Kapitan, she will therefore regard her future with respect to A -ing at t_j as closed, just as (b₁) asserts.¹⁰

Is this account of agential openness in fact acceptable? Certainly much about it has an air of plausibility. It is plausible, for example, to construe openness as a kind of contingency; and given that the openness of an action-type for an agent can vary with circumstances (changes in the agent's abilities, in external opportunities, and so on), it is plausible to construe such openness as a relative modality, namely, contingency relative to some set of propositions $\{\Pi\}$. Furthermore, given that we are concerned here with a doxastic stricture on an agent's intentional capacities, it is surely correct to construe $\{\Pi\}$ as consisting wholly of propositions believed by the agent. But *which* propositions believed by the agent? More specifically, why suppose that the propositions in question will include P (rather than limiting the relevant propositions to those, if any, which S believes to set forth the *deterministic causes* of her action)? The answer to this question is far from obvious.

If the answer is to be found in the demands of rationality, we should be able to identify some benefit accruing to the agent from the belief that her own foreknown actions are closed, so that even God and psychic self-predictors would be worse off without this belief. There are two sorts of contexts in which this might be the case. In the first place, planning for the future would be impossibly complex if in the course of practical reasoning we had to regard as open all those aspects of the future which (so far as we know) actually are open. Thus it is essential that we make certain simplifying assumptions about the future, which we can then draw upon in attempting to reach decisions about other aspects of the future. (Perhaps God too

would find such assumptions useful.) These include not only assumptions about the conditions in which we will be acting ("Assuming that it rains tomorrow . . ."), but also assumptions about our own actions ("Given that I accept the offer . . ."). Such assumptions may range from the purely hypothetical ("Were I to accept the offer . . .") to the quite definite ("Since I am going to accept the offer . . ."); in either case the exigencies of planning may lead one to regard the issue (at least provisionally) as *closed* for purposes of further practical reasoning.¹¹

But clearly this sense in which the future might be regarded as closed does nothing to buttress the Doxastic Argument. Assumptions on the hypothetical end of the spectrum do not support a *belief* about the future, and the sense of closure they give rise to is purely heuristic. Assumptions on the other end of the spectrum, which reflect definite decisions, are also useless to the Problem of Agency; for while they may rise to the level of belief ("I will accept the offer"), such beliefs about the agent's future come with (and depend upon) the agent's decision about her future, rather than pre-empting it; and while the sense of closure accompanying this belief is perhaps more than purely heuristic, it is a product of the agent's successful exercise of practical reasoning and is thus supportive of agency rather than subversive of it.

The second context in which the agent would benefit from the belief that the future is closed is where the future really is closed, independent of the agent's own decisions or heuristic assumptions; for if there *are* no alternatives to S 's A -ing at t_j , the *belief* that there are no alternatives to her A -ing at t_j will have the beneficial effect of diverting S away from unpromising lines of practical reasoning. The chances that such a belief will be held in a context in which it is true are of course increased

if the agent has good reasons to hold the belief, and this suggests that the Doxastic Argument's assertion of a necessary connection between the belief that one will *A* at t_1 and the belief that one's future is closed with respect to *A*-ing at t_1 is simply the claim that the former belief constitutes a rationally compelling reason for the latter. This seems to be just the sort of connection required by the Doxastic Argument; for if *S*'s belief that she will *A* at t_1 does *not* make it rational for her to believe that her future is closed with respect to *A*-ing at t_1 , it is hard to see in what way these beliefs *could* be connected so as to be applicable to God, or even support some interesting generalization about human agency. This will of course restrict any generalization to *rational* agency; but this is where real interest in the Problem of Agency lies in any case.

For the Doxastic Argument to succeed, then, it must be the case that any (rational and self-reflective) agent who believes at t_0 that

P: I will *A* at t_1

will also believe at t_0 that no alternatives to *P* are then available to her. She will believe, that is, that

Q: $\Box_0 P$,

where " \Box_0 " symbolizes that *P* is true in all worlds which the agent has the power to bring about at t_0 . So understood, the central question regarding the Doxastic Argument appears to be whether $P \supset Q$ — whether, that is, $P \supset \Box_0 P$. For if it is true that $P \supset \Box_0 P$ — and true in so straightforward a manner that only an imbecile would fail to see it — then any rational agent who believes *P* will also believe $\Box_0 P$; but if it is false that $P \supset \Box_0 P$, it is a total mystery why every rational agent would nevertheless believe $\Box_0 P$ upon believing *P*, and do so as a requirement of being rational.

III

In considering whether it is indeed straightforwardly true that $P \supset \Box_0 P$, it will be helpful to look at some of the ways in which one might try to move from the proposition that one will do such-and-such to the proposition that the future is closed with respect to such-and-suching. Most are obvious nonstarters for the purpose at hand. For example, the conjunction of *P* with

R: My future is now closed with respect to my action(s) at t_1 (whatever they might be)

implies $\Box_0 P$; but *R* is simply trumped up to achieve this result, and there is absolutely no reason to think that every rational agent would accept it (though it is easy to think of situations in which some might). Again, the conjunction of *P* with

S: My future is causally determined by my past

implies $\Box_0 P$; but the considerations underlying *S* are so far from straightforward that acceptance of *S* can hardly be made a requirement of rationality, even if *S* happens to be true. In contrast to these approaches, the idea that $\Box_0 P$ follows straightforwardly from *P* (in such a way that the Problem of Agency is unavoidable for rational agents) is characteristic of arguments for *fatalism*. Let's look briefly at three such arguments, beginning with the simplest (and thus the one most likely to have a universal appeal).

The first "argument" (it's hard to dignify it this way) justifies the inference from *P* to $\Box_0 P$ on the grounds that "if I am going to *A* at t_1 , then I am going to *A* at t_1 ." How exactly this is supposed to support the inference is far from clear, but it may have something to do with the fact that the conditional offered as justification is a tautology and thus itself necessary. Suppose the necessity could be parsed this way: "If I am going to *A* at t_1 , then, necessarily, I am going to *A* at t_1 ." Then the

argument would go like this: $P, P \supset$ necessarily P, \therefore necessarily P . This argument has the virtue of being valid, but the vice of misrepresenting the tautology, which must instead be rendered, “Necessarily, if I am going to A at t_j , then I am going to A at t_j .” The argument then comes to this: P , necessarily ($P \supset P$), \therefore necessarily P . But this involves an egregious modal fallacy (“Sleigh’s fallacy,” as it has been called). Because it is so egregious, let us call the position based on this fallacy “Naive Fatalism.” Insofar as the Doxastic Argument presupposes that we all reason like Naive Fatalists, it errs on a matter of fact (since we do not all reason this way) and disqualifies itself as a stricture on *rational* agency (since it errs in ways that rational agents can, and should, avoid).¹²

The next approach regards the intuitions underlying the preceding argument as basically sound but in need of a more philosophically sophisticated expression. Let us therefore call this position “Sophisticated Fatalism.” The idea is that what makes it unavoidable that I am going to A at t_j is that it is already true that I am going to A at t_j , and what is already true is necessary in the sense that no one (not me, not even God) can do anything about it now. This allows the argument of the Naive Fatalist to be restated so that it appears to avoid the fallacy. The new argument goes like this. If P , then

T: It was true before I was born that P .

And T of course entails P . But if T , then $\Box_o T$ (since I can’t do anything now about what was the case before I was even born). So we get the valid argument: $\Box_o T, \Box(T \supset P), \therefore \Box_o P$. Unfortunately for Sophisticated Fatalism, escape from its Naive cousin’s invalidity comes at the price of unsoundness. T is a classic example of what has come to be called a “soft fact” about the past, and only “hard facts” are unavoidable

constituents of the past. According to William Ockham, who first deployed the distinction to argue against fatalism, soft facts “are about the present or about the past as regards their wording only and are equivalently about the future,”¹³ while hard facts are really (and not just verbally) about the past or present. “It was true before I was born that I will A at t_j ” is about as “soft” as any fact about the past can be. Its truth depends entirely on what happens at t_j ; it does not “harden” as a fact until t_j arrives. “ $\Box_o T$ ” is therefore unacceptable as a premise: it doesn’t follow from P unless there is some independent reason to think that $\Box_o P$, in which case it would be pointless to employ it as a reason for believing that $\Box_o P$. So Sophisticated Fatalism won’t do as a basis for the Problem of Agency.¹⁴

The problem with T can be remedied by finding some other proposition which entails P and is also unavoidably necessary at t_o . Classical theism provides such a proposition:

U: God believed before I was born that P .

The argument for “Theological Fatalism,” as we might dub it, goes like this: $\Box_o U, \Box(U \supset P), \therefore \Box_o P$. This argument, like the one for Sophisticated Fatalism, is valid; unlike the argument for Sophisticated Fatalism, however, it may well be sound. Because the beliefs of the theistic God are infallible, $\Box(U \supset P)$ must be premised as true; and because the occurrence of a belief at a time, unlike the truth of a proposition at a time, is surely a “hard” (rather than a “soft”) fact about that time, it would appear that $\Box_o U$ is true as well (assuming that the theistic God exists). Human beliefs, after all, are no less “hard” than other historical events. While such beliefs may certainly figure in soft facts about the past — e.g., “In 1988, three years before it actually happened, Higgenbotham believed that the USSR would break up,” which is soft relative to

1989 — the simple assertion that a belief occurred at a time is always a hard fact about the past — e.g., “In 1988 Higgenbotham believed that the USSR would break up,” which is hard relative to 1989. There is no apparent reason why divine beliefs (assuming that they occur in time) should be different from human beliefs in this respect, however different they may be in other respects.¹⁵

Of these three fatalistic arguments, only the one for Theological Fatalism avoids obvious error. This is not to say that it is in fact successful: the argument does assume, after all, that the theistic God (or some other infallible foreknower) exists; furthermore, there is continuing controversy over whether *U* is indeed a hard fact prior to t_1 (in contrast with *T*, which is certainly *not* a hard fact). But at least Theological Fatalism, unlike its Naive and Sophisticated cousins, is not a nonstarter.¹⁶ It is therefore the only one of the three that might be rational for someone to accept. Of course, any of the fatalistic arguments might be accepted by an *irrational* agent, or by a rational agent suffering a momentary and regrettable loss of reason. But these are the uninteresting cases of the Problem of Agency. It is the Theological Fatalist alone who faces the Problem of Agency in its only interesting form.¹⁷

Perhaps there are other arguments that do a comparable or superior job of explaining why $P \supset Q$ — I certainly haven't canvassed all the possible arguments here. But the fact of the matter is that the friends of the Problem of Agency have failed to identify these alternative arguments. In the face of this failure, it is reasonable to conclude that there is no (interesting) Problem of Agency unless Theological Fatalism is true. The onus is on the person denying this claim to come forward with the alternative argument by which the Problem of Agency might be generated for a rational agent who holds a belief about her own future actions.

IV

We began with two problems supposedly generated by knowledge of the future. Our quest to understand the Problem of Agency has led us to focus on the Doxastic Argument and the grounds for supposing that the belief that I will *A* at t_1 makes it rationally compelling for me to believe as well that my *A*-ing at t_1 is now unavoidably necessary. It is hard to imagine what these grounds might be apart from something like Theological Fatalism. If this assessment is correct, consideration of the Problem of Agency has brought us face-to-face with the second of our two foreknowledge problems; for the Problem of Freedom is nothing other than the predicament posed by Theological Fatalism, with the addition of a premise connecting libertarian freedom with the ability to do otherwise (holding the actual past fixed).

There is a close parallel, then, between the two foreknowledge problems: while the Problem of Agency begins with the *belief* that one will do such-and-such, moves from there to the *belief* that the future is closed with respect to such-and-suching, and concludes from this belief that *intentional agency* is impossible, the Problem of Freedom begins with the *fact* that one will do such-and-such, moves from there to the *fact* that the future is closed with respect to such-and-suching, and concludes from this fact that *libertarian freedom* is impossible. Moreover, because the beliefs that figure in the Problem of Agency are connected only by the ties of rationality, they presuppose the connections between facts that figure in the Problem of Freedom. What must be true for the latter to be genuine, must be believed true for the former to arise, and must be *both* believed *and* true for the former to be completely rational. In short, the first problem may be regarded as a doxastic version of the second problem.

This means that a number of assumptions that are well-nigh universal in the contemporary discussion of these two problems are instead mistaken. These assumptions are: (1) that the Problem of Agency is logically independent of the Problem of Freedom; (2) that the Problem of Agency imposes a general stricture on (rational) agency; (3) that it is only the libertarian conception of (free) agency that is threatened by the Problem of Freedom; and (4) that the Problem of Agency is most serious for an omniscient foreknower like the theistic God. I will now summarize what is mistaken in each of these assumptions.

(1) The Problem of Agency is parasitic on the Problem of Freedom. This point is already implicit in the foregoing analysis, but is worth making explicit. The Problem of Agency presupposes the presumptive agent's acceptance of a fatalistic argument; but only the argument for Theological Fatalism stands any chance of being sound; therefore the Problem of Agency is ineliminable for a rational agent only if the argument for Theological Fatalism is sound. Since the latter argument sets forth the Problem of Freedom, the Problem of Agency (in its only interesting form) is dependent on the Problem of Freedom. This means that the independent treatment of these problems in the contemporary debate is misguided. The Problem of Agency does not exist in splendid isolation from the Problem of Freedom, but depends for its cogency on the Problem of Freedom. The two problems are really one, and the resolution of this joint problem depends on current investigations of the Problem of Freedom rather than the Problem of Agency.

(2) The Problem of Agency cannot be regarded as a stricture on rational agency per se. Whether it makes agency problematic in any given case depends on whether the erstwhile agent infers Q from P ; and whether it makes *rational*

agency problematic depends on whether it is *rational* for the agent to infer Q from P . At worst, it might always be fallacious to infer Q from P , in which case the Problem of Agency would arise only in certain cases of *irrational* agency. At best, there might be a fatalistic argument acceptance of which would not constitute an obvious blunder, in which case rational agency would be jeopardized only for aspiring agents who accept the argument's premises. Despite their intuitive appeal, such expressions of the Problem of Agency as the maxim, "One can't deliberate over what one already knows is going to happen," do not impose a general stricture on rational agency (though they could well constrain the agency of theists who are also Theological Fatalists).

(3) The Problem of Freedom does more than annul the libertarian freedom of actions that are infallibly foreknown; it raises the Problem of Agency as well. If the argument for Theological Fatalism is sound, it may be rational to accept it; and if it is rational to accept it, then anyone who does accept it and holds a belief about her own future actions has a rational basis for reaching a fatalistic conclusion about those actions, and for abandoning agential initiatives directed toward those actions. Thus it is not just a particular and controversial conception of *free* agency that is at stake in the Problem of Freedom, but the agency simpliciter (libertarian or otherwise) of forebelievers unfortunate enough to realize that the argument for Theological Fatalism works. Given the assumptions underlying that argument, this will be a particular occupational hazard of rational and self-reflective theists — among whom must be numbered God, who is a rational and self-reflective theist if anyone is. Among the actions God foreknows are His own future actions; so these will be just as fated as human actions, if the argument for

Theological Fatalism is sound. But if the future doings of an omniscient being are unavoidably necessary, He must know that they are unavoidably necessary (otherwise He wouldn't be omniscient). So His actions *in toto* are not only infected by the Problem of Freedom, but by the Problem of Agency as well.

(4) Despite what has just been said, the Problem of Agency is not necessarily more serious for the theistic God than it is for human beings. It is true that God, in virtue of His omniscience, will know in advance all His own future doings, and so will have *more* beliefs about what He will do than will a limited human knower about what she will do; but this will translate into a greater Problem of Agency only if there is a sound argument for fatalism. If there is, then an omniscient being will of course be aware of that argument and grasp its fatalistic implications, with agential sclerosis the necessary consequence — divine omniscience, as Tomis Kapitan is fond of claiming, will entail divine impotence. But if there is no sound argument for fatalism, it won't matter that God knows in advance everything He is going to do, since He will resist inferring unavoidability from the mere fact that an action is going to take place. A nonomniscient being might endorse a mistaken inference, thereby jeopardizing her agency in the (presumably small) number of cases where she holds a prior belief about what she will do; but an omniscient being would never endorse a mistake.

If I am right, the real action is to be found in the debates surrounding the Problem of

Freedom, with the Problem of Agency (now in a stripped-down form) crucially dependent on the outcome of those debates. This does, however, leave an important question unresolved. Why is the Problem of Agency so viscerally compelling, apart from the considerations brought out in the Problem of Freedom? Isn't the immediate claim the Problem of Agency makes on our intuitions incompatible with its really resting on an *argument* connecting *P* with *Q*? This is perhaps a psychological rather than a philosophical question, though it is worth noting that Naive Fatalism is also immediate and visceral in its appeal. I suspect that the Problem of Agency, as it actually arises for most of us, rests less on Theological Fatalism or even Sophisticated Fatalism, and more on the seductive draw of Naive Fatalism. Consider a soldier in a foxhole who reasons as follows: either there is a bullet with my name on it, or there isn't; if there is, it is useless to keep my head down; if there isn't, it is unnecessary to keep my head down; therefore, it is pointless to keep my head down. It is quite possible to identify the fallacy in this sort of argument only to find oneself falling back under its spell five minutes later — indeed, I suspect that this is a rather common experience (at least among people capable of picking out the fallacy in the first place). This being the case, if the Problem of Agency is simply a doxastic form of fatalism, as I have argued, its intuitive appeal is just what one would expect, given the larger phenomenon of fatalism's deceptive hold over our judgment.

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NOTES

1. Some of the sources in which this problem receives sympathetic treatment are: Carl Ginet, "Can the Will be Caused?" *The Philosophical Review* 71 (January 1962), pp. 49-55; Richard Taylor, "Deliberation and Foreknowledge," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (January 1964), pp. 73-80; Richard R. La Croix, "Omniprescience and Divine Determinism," *Religious Studies* 12 (Sept. 1976), pp. 365-381; Nicholas Denyer, *Time, Action and Necessity* (London: Duckworth, 1981); Tomis Kapitan, "Can God Make Up His Mind?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15 (1984), pp. 37-47; Daniel C. Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); Tomis Kapitan, "Deliberation and the Presumption of Open Alternatives," *Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (April 1986), pp. 230-251; and Galen Strawson, *Freedom and Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). No one claims that agency is threatened by the subject's *nonoccurrent* or *unaccessed* beliefs; consequently I assume in what follows that it is only *occurrent* beliefs that are in question.
2. The seminal source for this problem in the recent discussion is Nelson Pike's "Divine Foreknowledge and Voluntary Action," *The Philosophical Review* 74 (January 1965), pp. 27-46. The books and articles generated by Pike's essay are too numerous even to begin to list.
3. While the Problem of Freedom in the narrow sense cannot be generated by human foreknowledge, there may well be problems in the neighborhood of this one that are so generated. If I arrive from the future in a time machine and know what you are going to do because I just saw you do it, are there adverse consequences for your putative libertarian freedom? Whatever the answer to this question, it is certainly odd that it should depend on the fact that my knowledge fails to be absolutely *infallible*. If this intuition is sound, it may be that the Problem of Freedom (or at least a very close cousin) can be found in cases of human foreknowledge (as well as divine).
4. I have addressed the theological implications of the Problem of Agency in "Omniprescient Agency," *Religious Studies* 28 (September 1992), pp. 351-369, and "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (July 1993), pp. 396-416, while in "Dispositional Omniscience," *Philosophical Studies* 80 (December 1995), pp. 243-278, I defend a novel conception of divine knowledge which permits solutions to both the Problem of Agency and the Problem of Freedom.
5. This summary statement of the argument is closest to the more developed formulations given it by Tomis Kapitan in two recent articles: "Action, Uncertainty, and Divine Impotence," *Analysis* 50 (March 1990), pp. 127-133, and "Agency and Omniscience," *Religious Studies* 27 (March 1991), pp. 105-121. But the basic idea may also be found in Denyer, p. 50; Robert G. Burton, "Choice," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 42 (June 1982), p. 583; and David Basinger, "Omniscience and Deliberation: A Response to Reichenbach," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 20 (1986), p. 171.
6. Ginet, p. 52.
7. This response to the Conflation Argument is much influenced by Alvin Goldman's treatment of the issue in *A Theory of Human Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). He introduces the distinction between optative and declarative propositions on p. 102, and applies the distinction to the Problem of Agency on pp. 176-194.
8. Taylor, p. 75.
9. See Kapitan's discussion of the "principle of least effort" in his "Agency and Omniscience," pp. 109-110.
10. Openness as contingency relative to the agent's occurrent beliefs becomes an explicit and established part of Kapitan's analysis of the Problem of Agency with his "Deliberation and the Presumption of Open Alternatives."

11. For further discussion of this practical sense of closure, see Michael E. Bratman, *Intentions, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). Bratman argues that intending to *A* does not necessarily imply that one believes that one will *A* (though it does imply *not* believing that one will *not A*); it does, however, involve a *commitment* to *A*-ing, and this in turn plays a role in one's further plans, forming a background against which further intendings are acquired. Having intended to *A*, and thus being committed to *A*-ing, makes it inconsistent from an *internal* perspective for one not to *A*, though it is not inconsistent from an *external* perspective (since one presumably has the *power* not to *A*). Though reconsideration is always possible, there is a certain presumption against reconsideration and in favor of stability — otherwise provisional intentions could not be used as standards for the relevance and admissibility of further options, as his “planning” theory requires.

12. Perhaps the best-known defense of Naive Fatalism by a contemporary philosopher is Richard Taylor's in the chapter on “Fate” in his *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

13. William of Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, trans. & intro. Marilyn McCord Adams & Norman Kretzmann, (New York: Century Philosophy Sourcebooks, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969). I have combined phrases from two passages, one on p. 46 and one on p. 47.

14. Recent versions of Sophisticated Fatalism may be found in Gilbert Ryle, “It Was To Be,” in *Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1954), and Steven Cahn, *Fate, Logic, and Time* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1967).

15. Some contributors to the modern debate, following Ockham's own lead, have argued that *U* as well as *T* is a soft fact about the past. The seminal articles for this “Ockhamist” critique of Theological Fatalism are John Turk Saunders, “Of God and Freedom,” *The Philosophical Review* 75 (April 1966), pp. 219-225, and Marilyn McCord Adams, “Is the Existence of God a ‘Hard’ Fact?” *The Philosophical Review* 76 (October 1967), pp. 492-503. In “Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (April 1995), pp. 153-165, I argue that the Ockhamist position might be plausible if divine beliefs are understood nonoccurrently.

16. For the superiority of theological over logical fatalism, see David Widerker, “Two Forms of Fatalism,” in *God, Foreknowledge and Freedom*, ed. J. M. Fischer (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1989). A good discussion may also be found in the first part of Nelson Pike's “Theological Fatalism and Prior Truth” (unpublished manuscript).

17. The arguments originally offered by Tomis Kapitan appear to presuppose (or at least flirt with) Naive Fatalism. More recently, however, he has suggested that the Doxastic Argument could rest equally well on Theological Fatalism. For a discussion of this issue, see Kapitan's “The Incompatibility of Omniscience and Intentional Action: A Reply to David P. Hunt,” *Religious Studies* 30 (January 1994), pp. 55-66, and my “The Compatibility of Omniscience and Intentional Action: A Reply to Tomis Kapitan,” *Religious Studies* 32 (March 1996), pp. 49-60.