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What *Is* the Problem of Theological Fatalism?

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FATALISM IS THE DOCTRINE that free agency is a chimera because the future is no more open than the past. This makes fatalism's challenge to human freedom different from one based on causal necessitation, inasmuch as the necessity that attaches to the past simply because it is past has nothing to do with causal determinism: pastness alone makes an event necessary by ensuring that alternatives to the event are no longer accessible. The sense in which the past may be regarded as necessary is captured well in a famous stanza from *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*:

> The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Such necessity is not only different from but also stronger than that implied by ordinary determinism: although an omnipotent being can presumably suspend a natural law to avert a causally determined event while it is yet future, no resource available to omnipotence can bring about the non-occurrence of an earlier event, given that this event has already occurred. Aristotle, quoting Agathon, notes that "this alone is lacking even to God, to make undone things that have once been done,"[1] while Aquinas maintains that divine power over the past would be self-contradictory: "As such it is more impossible than the raising of the dead to life, which implies no contradiction, and is called impossible only according to natural power."[2] Fatalism simply extends this "temporal necessity" to encompass the future as well as the past. Of course, this makes no difference to human agency if free will and moral responsibility are compatible with necessity. It is only under robustly incompatibilist criteria for freedom and responsibility that the denial of future contingencies yields a properly "fatalistic" conclusion.

There are two principal sources for philosophical arguments supportive of fatalism. One is the assumption that future-tense statements are just as determinate in their truth-values as are past-tense statements. Arguments purporting to derive fatalistic conclusions from this assumption alone go back at least as far as Aristotle's *On Interpretation*. We may call this "logical" or "prior truth" fatalism. The other source, which finds its first clear formulation in Augustine's *On Free Choice*

[1]*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2.1139b10–11.
[2]*Summa theologiae* I.25.4.

of the Will, adds the requirement that these prior truths are foreknown by God. Let us therefore call this "theological" fatalism. While it is now widely recognized that logical fatalism rests on a modal confusion, theological fatalism is not so easily dismissed.[3] Indeed, a re-formulation by Nelson Pike has made theological fatalism one of the most hotly debated topics in philosophy during the last thirty years.[4]

A simple but useful exposition of the argument for theological fatalism might go like this. Suppose that an agent X, who comes into existence at time t_0, performs an action A at time t_1. Then the following premises would appear to be available:

(P_1) If the theistic God exists, then at some time prior to t_0 there exists an infallible belief that X will A at t_1.

(P_2) If at some time prior to t_0 there exists an infallible belief that X will A at t_1, then at no time $t \geq t_0$ is it possible for X to refrain from A-ing at t_1.

(P_3) If at no time $t \geq t_0$ is it possible for X to refrain from A-ing at t_1, then X's A-ing at t_1 is not a case of libertarian free agency.

But these premises entail, by hypothetical syllogism, that

(P_C) If the theistic God exists, then X's A-ing at t_1 is not a case of libertarian free agency.

Since the argument is clearly generalizable to any action, it would appear that divine foreknowledge poses a serious threat to the very possibility of libertarian freedom (assuming, of course, that the argument is sound).

The problem set forth in the foregoing argument has attracted a variety of responses over the last two millennia. That there is still no consensus on a solution, despite the heightened attention it has received in recent years, is perhaps only what one should expect from a philosophical problem. But in this case confusion over the solution has been aggravated by confusion over the problem itself. There are at least two distinct problems that underlie the problem of theological fatalism, and a failure to distinguish them has compounded the already formidable difficulties surrounding this ancient conundrum. Or so I propose to argue in the following pages.

[3]The basic argument for logical fatalism goes like this: X will A at t; if X will A at t, then necessarily X will A at t; therefore necessarily X will A at t. If "necessarily" is given wide scope in premise two, the premise is true but the conclusion fails to follow; if "necessarily" is given narrow scope, the conclusion follows but there is no reason to think that premise two is true (unless one is simply assuming fatalism all along). More sophisticated versions of the argument attempt to implicate X's future action in the necessity of the past by specifying that it *was* or *is already* true that X will A at t; but these efforts only serve to mask the fallacy. For an analysis of how logical fatalism succumbs to the fallacy while theological fatalism avoids it, see David Widerker, "Two Forms of Fatalism" in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom,* ed. John Martin Fischer (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989) pp. 97–110.

[4]Nelson Pike, "Divine Foreknowledge and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965) 27–46. Well over 100 articles in major professional journals have addressed the case for theological fatalism since the publication of Pike's essay.

I

Why should the argument set forth in (P_1)-(P_3) be thought to lay bare a *problem* or *puzzle* (as opposed to a simple mistake, on the one hand, or the unvarnished truth, on the other)? The reason is that this argument, like other arguments setting forth classic philosophical puzzles (ranging from Zeno's paradoxes of motion to the problem of other minds to the surprise-exam paradox), appears at first blush to be unexceptionable, while at the same time its conclusion looks highly dubious.

With regard to its apparent unexceptionableness, the argument is clearly valid (assuming that no fallacies of equivocation are lurking about), and each of its premises is *prima facie* irresistible. (P_1) simply draws upon one aspect of a standard theistic conception of God, namely,

(T) God is necessarily omniscient, inerrant, and everlastingly existent,[5]

and shows what this implies in the case where X will A at t_1. (P_1) does not assert that such a being actually exists; all it says is that, *if* He exists, there will also exist before X is even born an essentially inerrant belief to the effect that X will A at t_1. (P_2), for its part, lays out an apparently irrefutable consequence of infallibility.[6] If the belief that X will A at t_1 is infallible, it is simply impossible for subsequent events to unfold in such a way that the belief turn out to be wrong. Certainly there are logically possible worlds in which X refrains from A-ing at t_1 (and in which the theistic God therefore believes that X will refrain from A-ing at t_1). But the possibility at issue in (P_2) is not logical possibility; it is "temporal possibility." For this modality the relevant question is: what directions for the future remain open, given the course already taken by the past? Once God forms the infallible belief that X will A at t_1, alternative worlds in which X refrains from A-ing at t_1 are no longer accessible (to X or, for that matter, to anyone, including God). Prior to the formation of such a belief, of course, it might well be an open question whether X will A at t_1 (and whether an infallible belief will be formed to that effect). But it contributes nothing to X's free agency if his future is open only prior to his birth, which is all that the argument allows; nor will it be open even then, since God knows what X will do from eternity, leaving *no* time prior to the formation of His belief that X will A at t_1. (P_2) therefore seems inescapable. Finally, (P_3)

[5]I should add that (T) presupposes a concept of omniscience under which x is omniscient only if, for *all* p (future as well as past, present, and timeless), x knows that p or x knows that ~p. Without this proviso (T) could not be used to distinguish between theists who accept (P_1) and those who reject it on the grounds that omniscience does not require foreknowledge of future contingents (perhaps because such foreknowledge is incoherent).

[6]The only possible exception is where there is a first moment of time and t_1 is that moment. I ignore that possibility in the paper, for the problems it addresses will not disappear just because there may be a t_1 to which they do not apply. With this possible exception out of play, the consequent of (P_2) follows not only from its antecedent but also from more restricted antecedents, *e.g.*, "there exists *at all times prior to* t_1 an infallible belief that X will A at t_1," or "there exists *at all times prior to* t_1-*u* an infallible belief that X will A at t_1," where u is a finite amount of time which is not greater than the age of the universe (if the universe has an age). Supposing that there was a time at which X did not exist, the antecedent of (P_2) could also be replaced with "there exists *at some time prior to the generation of X* an infallible belief that X will A at t." Infallible beliefs formed during X's lifetime may also entail an absence of alternatives to X's A-ing at t_1, depending on the circumstances of the case.

simply sets forth part of the libertarian conception of free agency. It does not assert that there actually are any instances of free agency, nor does it assert that the libertarian conception of free agency is the correct one; it merely notes one requirement that X's A-ing at t_1 must satisfy if it is to count as an instance of libertarian free agency. In sum, it is not at all easy to see how the argument for theological fatalism could fail to be sound; if there is an error here, it is at least not an egregiously transparent one.

The other ingredient which, in combination with the argument's soundness, makes the case for theological fatalism so baffling is the dubiousness of its conclusion. This is certainly less pronounced than in the case of some other philosophical puzzles: (P_C) is perhaps not completely *preposterous*, in the way that statements denying the reality of motion, the existence of other minds, and the possibility of surprise-exams are preposterous. Indeed, (P_C) may strike some as nothing less than the sober truth. Nevertheless, there are at least a couple of directions from which suspicions regarding (P_C) might arise. The first is where one has independent reason to affirm (P_C)'s antecedent and to deny its consequent. This reason might be good or bad; its grounds might vary from fideistic commitment to sophisticated argumentation; but regardless of its provenance or legitimacy, anyone who inclines with any strength toward the view that the theistic God and (at least some) instances of libertarian free agency are both real should be puzzled by the existence of a powerful argument to the contrary. Since the puzzle here arises from what is at least partly a theological commitment, let us call this the "*theological* problem" raised by theological fatalism, a problem which springs from a favorable impression of the argument's soundness coupled with the considered conviction that

(TP) the theistic God and instances of libertarian free agency both exist.

Commitment to (TP) presumably goes a long way toward explaining why the argument for theological fatalism struck early formulators like Augustine and Boethius as problematic and continues to do so for present-day theists.

The other source of suspicion regarding (P_C) concerns the connection between antecedent and consequent rather than their truth-values. Whether or not the theistic God and/or libertarian free agency are real, it may seem incredible that the former should entail the negation of the latter. Since (P_C) is the product of three different entailments (those making up the argument's three premises), it is worth considering whether it is possible to be more precise about the locus of (P_C)'s incredibility. After all, the theistic concept of God is sufficiently rich that it might harbor multiple threats to human freedom, and insofar as (P_C) merely reports that one of these threats is successful, incredulity is perhaps too strong a response. Indeed, some ways of deriving (P_C)—for example, *via* considerations of divine *omnipotence*—might make it not very incredible at all. What is incredible about (P_C) is that it should follow from considerations of divine *omniscience*. If A is in other respects an ideal candidate for a libertarianly free action, how could the mere fact that A is *infallibly foreknown* make a difference to its eleutheric standing? Whatever it is in virtue of which an action qualifies as an exercise of free agency, it is surely not the sort of thing that can be undercut simply by introducing a third

party's cognitions into the situation![7] Augustine's comment that divine foreknowledge of a voluntary action ought to confirm rather than negate the action's voluntariness—even if it cannot (on pain of begging the question) serve as an independent refutation of the argument for theological fatalism—seems intuitively right.[8] It seems right even if foreknowledge of an action does in fact imply its unavoidability. Perhaps there is some theory of knowledge on which the existence of present conditions rendering the action unavoidable is a necessary requirement for genuine foreknowledge (as opposed to correct conjecture); or perhaps there is some interpretation of quantum mechanics on which knowledge of a future action makes it determinate in such a way that it can no longer be regarded as contingent. Neither of these claims seems very likely; but even if true, it is not clear where these supposed truths could be entering the argument so as to influence its conclusion. The argument considers only what it is for a belief to *be* infallible; it makes no assumptions about the conditions under which infallible belief might be *available* to someone.

It is worth noting that Pike himself, while highlighting his argument's implications for theological theory-construction, also recognized the apparent negation of voluntary agency by divine foreknowledge as an additional source of befuddlement independent of one's commitment to the truth of theism. In the opening paragraph of his paper, for example, he says of "the claim that if God is omniscient, no human action is voluntary" that it "seems intuitively false. Surely, given only a doctrine describing God's *knowledge,* nothing about the voluntary status of human actions will follow."[9] And yet Pike thought he could show that it *does* follow. This is a surprising result, quite apart from any theological commitments one might have. Let us therefore call it simply the "*metaphysical* problem" to distinguish it from the theological problem. The metaphysical problem is rooted in the intuition that

(MP) the mere fact that an action is foreknown, even infallibly so, should have no effect on its status with respect to libertarian free agency.

Notice that this intuition isolates the metaphysical problem in premises (P_2) and (P_3); (MP) does not in any way concern (P_1). Introducing the problem *via* an appeal to God may be useful inasmuch as it makes for a vivid thought-experiment or identifies an important casualty of the problem; but God is not a logically essential element in the metaphysical problem *per se*.[10]

Can this problem be focused further—say, by tracing it to a single one of the remaining premises? This is doubtful: the problem emerges as a violation of intu-

[7]Whether free agency can be jeopardized by the agent's *own* pre-cognitions is another matter altogether. Maxims like "one cannot deliberate over what one already knows is going to happen" suggest that it can be. For a critical discussion of this position, see my "Omniprescient Agency," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992) 351–69; "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993) 394–414; and "The Compatibility of Omniscience and Intentional Action: A Reply to Tomis Kapitan," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996) 49–60.

[8]*On Free Choice of the Will* III.3.

[9]Pike, p. 27.

[10]I first distinguish the theological from the metaphysical problem in my "Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?" in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1995) 153–65.

ition, and neither (P_2) nor (P_3) grates on one's intuitions in quite the way that their combination does. Indeed, when considered in isolation, each seems eminently plausible, for reasons given at the beginning of this section.[11] (Either or both may of course be *false*—but that is a different matter.) While a single premise may turn out to hold the key to the problem's *solution,* the problem evidently benefits from including both (P_2) and (P_3) in its *formulation*.

II

With the theological and metaphysical problems in mind, let us consider the two responses to theological fatalism that have dominated the discussion in recent years. The first is the endeavor to deny (P_1). Such a move is clearly impossible if (T) is simply taken to be stipulative of what "the theistic God" *means* in this premise. But if "the theistic God" is taken instead to have a content independent of the way it is introduced in (P_1), it is open to a critic to claim that (T) misrepresents that content. This claim has in fact been made, and on two different grounds. One is that theism does not require *as much* omniscience as (P_1) presupposes: given that X is A-ing at t_1, God admittedly possesses at and after t_1 an infallible belief that X is A-ing at t_1, but He is not required to possess this belief *prior* to t_1 (or at least not before X irreversibly commits himself to A-ing at t_1). But then the argument for theological fatalism collapses: if the consequent of (P_1) is modified to exclude divine knowledge of future contingents, the antecedent of (P_2) must be similarly modified to preserve the argument's validity; but the price of this modification is (P_2)'s truth since the availability of alternatives to X's A-ing at t_1 depends only on how matters stand going into t_1, and God (so modified) no longer holds an infallible belief regarding X's action until t_1 is present. This restriction on divine omniscience has been endorsed by Richard Purtill, Richard Swinburne, William Hasker, and Peter Geach, among others.[12] The other ground for rejecting (P_1) is the Boethian doctrine of divine eternity, under which God is understood to possess atemporal existence. This doctrine allows one to deny that there is *any time at all* at which God knows that X will A at t_1, while at the same time denying that this represents any diminution in divine knowledge. This would appear to

[11]When A→B and B→C both pass muster but A→C does not, a plausible initial hypothesis is that the problem stems from an equivocation on the middle term, B. Disequivocating the argument must leave one of the premised entailments false. Whether the argument is ultimately indicted for harboring a false premise or for committing the fallacy of equivocation is sometimes a difficult call to make. This is a central issue in the interpretation of Augustine's famous analysis of the problem of foreknowledge. See my "Augustine on Theological Fatalism: The Argument of *De Libero Arbitrio* III.1–4," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996) 1–30.

[12]Purtill denies that future contingencies have a definite truth-value. Swinburne grants them a truth-value but denies that they are knowable *qua* contingent: God, he maintains, has the power to know them but voluntarily refrains from exercising this power in order to preserve their contingency. Hasker combines elements from Purtill and from Swinburne, offering his brief against divine foreknowledge on behalf of what he calls "Free-Will Theism." Finally, Geach grants their knowability but denies that they are really about the future (as opposed to the present tendencies of things). See Richard Purtill, "Fatalism and the Omnitemporality of Truth," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988) 185–92; Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977) ch. 10, esp. pp. 172–78; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989) pp. 119–26 (for affinities with Purtill) and pp. 187–90 (for affinities with Swinburne); and P. T. Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977) ch. 3.

undercut any argument, like the one under discussion, that tries to exclude libertarian freedom based on the temporal necessity of divine beliefs about the future. Of those who have understood God in this way, Norman Kretzmann, Eleonore Stump, and Brian Leftow have all touted it as a way of addressing the problem of theological fatalism.[13]

The second response favored in recent discussion is a rejection of (P_2). This has generally been done on "Ockhamist" grounds. William Ockham noted that, in the case of "propositions [which] are about the present as regards both their wording and their subject matter . . . it is universally true that every true proposition about the present has [corresponding to it] a necessary one about the past."[14] But Ockham denied that this is true of all propositions: "that proposition that is about the present in such a way that it is nevertheless equivalent to one about the future does not have [corresponding to it] a necessary proposition about the past." For example, "It is now true that Socrates will get up in five minutes" and "Socrates is sitting for the last time" are equivalent to propositions about the future, namely, "Socrates will get up in five minutes" and "Socrates will never again sit (as he is now doing)." Consequently, the corresponding propositions about the past are not always necessary: "It was true two minutes ago that Socrates will get up in five minutes," while posited as true, is not *necessarily* true; and "Socrates was sitting for the last time," while again assumed true, is also not necessary (temporally rather than logically) until Socrates ceases to exist (or at least becomes incapable of further sitting, *e.g.*, by becoming irrevocably disembodied). Ockham added that "All propositions having to do with predestination and reprobation are of this sort . . . , since they all are equivalently about the future even when they are verbally about the present or about the past."[15] In the contemporary discussion this position has been extended to God's past beliefs about future events. Just as "It was true two minutes ago that Socrates will get up in five minutes" is a "soft fact" (*i.e.*, one that is "equivalently about the future even when . . . verbally about the present or about the past"), so "God believed two minutes ago that Socrates will get up in five minutes" is regarded as a soft fact. Only when Socrates actually gets up does it become a "hard fact" that God believed that he would get up. In general, until X actually A's at t_1, God's prior belief that X will A at t_1 is not available as a hard fact about the past which can then mandate that the future unfold in line with it. Since (i) it is only insofar as it exists *prior to* t_1 that an infallible belief that X will A at t_1 precludes the possibility of refraining, (ii) by the Ockhamist's lights it is precisely prior to t_1 that the existence of such a belief is merely a soft fact, and (iii) a soft fact about the past is not temporally necessary and so cannot preclude any future alternatives, it follows that (P_2) is false.[16]

[13]See Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Prophecy, Past Truth, and Eternity" in *Philosophical Perspectives,* vol. 5: *Philosophy of Religion* (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991) pp. 395–424; and Brian Leftow, "Eternity and Simultaneity," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991) 148–79.

[14]William Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents,* trans. with intro., notes, and appendices by Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969) p. 46.

[15]*Ibid.,* p. 38.

[16]The first use of the "hard fact"/"soft fact" distinction against (P_2) in the post-Pikean phase of the debate may be found in John Turk Saunders, "Of God and Freedom," *Philosophical Review* 75 (1966) 219–25. Marilyn McCord Adams develops the position with explicit reference to the work of Ockham. See her "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?" in *Philosophical Review* 76 (1967) 492–503.

The acceptability of these two responses has been thoroughly (if not yet conclusively) vetted in the literature. Briefly, concerns over the first response have tended to focus on whether it is both theologically adequate and also necessary for avoiding theological fatalism. If God does not know future contingents, will not His providential control over history be impaired? If He exists outside time, how can He act in history at all? Such questions are not necessarily unanswerable, and in the course of addressing them, it might even turn out that some alternatives to (T) are theologically superior to it. But this cannot be determined without a close examination of the theological costs and benefits of the various alternatives, a complex business far exceeding the scope and purpose of the present paper. As for the second response, the concern here has more to do with its logical than with its theological plausibility. Given an episode of belief occurring at some time in the past, how could the occurrence of this episode fail (now) to be a hard fact about the past? Certainly past cases of human belief constitute hard facts about the past. Why should it make any difference that the believer is God or that the object of His belief lies in the future? That the hardness or softness of a past belief might depend on the identity of the believer and the content of the belief seems frankly incredible.

Whether "Ockhamism" is incredible not just on its face but also subcutaneously is a question on which much ink has been spilled, and I do not propose to add to the spillage here; nor shall I contribute anything toward discussion of the first response's adequacy.[17] What I would like to comment on, however, is the *relevance* of these two responses. Supposing that they perform as advertised, what exactly do they imply for the theological and metaphysical problems which underlie the problem of theological fatalism?

The question of relevance has a perfectly straightforward answer in the case of the first response, with its defense of an alternative conception of the theistic God. Because that response considers only (P_1), it does nothing to address the metaphysical problem. The most it can do is to show that a theist can believe in God without being committed to fatalism, and this is sufficient only to annul the theological problem posed by theological fatalism. It does nothing to explain or dissolve the intuition (shared to some degree, I would think, by libertarians and non-libertarians alike) that prior knowledge is just not the sort of thing that could possibly jeopardize free agency.

In the case of the second ("Ockhamist") response, the answer is considerably less straightforward. While rejecting (P_2), unlike rejecting (P_1), at least locates the problem in a premise relevant to the metaphysical problem, it does not follow automatically that a re-evaluation of (P_2) will actually result in a solution to this problem. If God's past cognitions about the future are soft just because they are *God's*—if, for example, what makes them soft is some peculiarity of the divine cognitive structure—then Ockhamism does not get past the theological problem. This is clearly the case where God's knowledge of the future does not entail fatal-

[17]I discuss one theological cost borne by restrictions on divine foreknowledge in my "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge" and then in "Prescience and Providence: A Reply to My Critics," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993) 428–38. In "Dispositional Omniscience," *Philosophical Studies* 80 (1995) 243–78, I suggest a different modification in the traditional understanding of the theistic God (allowing God to know some things dispositionally rather than occurrently) and argue that it has a more favorable cost-benefit balance than other restrictions on divine foreknowledge.

ism because it does not even come in the form of *beliefs*, as William Alston has suggested.[18] It would also be the case where divine foreknowledge is carried by beliefs but these are cashed out in terms of the "dispositional omniscience scenario" that I have proposed elsewhere.[19] We may grant these conceptions of the Divine Mind and still wonder what to make of an argument showing that infallibility *per se*, regardless of the further properties of its possessor, is incompatible with libertarian freedom. This shows that the metaphysical problem is alive and well, despite the fact that divine foreknowledge is no longer implicated in the problem.[20]

If, on the other hand, God's past beliefs about the future are soft just in virtue of being *infallible* (and not in virtue of some other peculiarity of the Deity), then (P_2) fails regardless of its connection with (P_1), and the metaphysical problem has been solved. The most straightforward case for this way of understanding the softness of divine foreknowledge goes like this: where p concerns the future, the fact that *so-and-so infallibly believed that p* will be a soft fact about the past because it entails something about the future (namely, p) and in that sense is "equivalently about the future," as Ockham put it. But the case is weak. Entailment-criteria for soft facthood have been subjected to severe criticism on the grounds that all facts—or at least an awful lot of those that are ordinarily thought to be paradigms of hardness—would turn out to be soft.[21] The variety of proposed analyses of the hard fact/soft fact distinction makes it impossible to examine here whether such criticism would be fatal to all attempts to ground the softness of divine foreknowledge in the infallibility of God's beliefs. But the position is certainly odd *prima facie*. As a mere sample of what is odd about it, suppose that the cosmic scribe of Omar Khayyam jots down in her book of hard facts that so-and-so is occurrently believing that the world will end in ten years. She then realizes that in recording this fact she had failed to note that the belief was infallible (the scribe is subject to occasional bouts of inattention but always catches herself afterwards). Is it at all plausible that this further fact would make her entry a mistake that must now be erased? (Certainly she will have to correct her omission of the belief's infallibility if she wants her record to be absolutely complete, but this is quite different from expunging any record of the belief's occurrence.) Perhaps an adequate Ockhamist account can be given of these and other consequences of locating the softness of God's forebeliefs in their infallibility; in the absence of such an account, however, these consequences appear strikingly counterintuitive.

The relevance of the two challenges to the argument for theological fatalism can now be laid out as follows. With respect to the first challenge, it is clear that rejecting (P_1) by disputing the argument's conception of God addresses the theological problem but not the metaphysical problem. As for the second challenge, rejecting (P_2) by disputing the hardness of God's past beliefs about the future may or may not address the metaphysical as well as the theological problem, depending on the form that this challenge takes. It is infallibility that does the real work in

[18]William P. Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs?" in *Religious Studies* 22 (1986) 287–306.

[19]See my "Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?".

[20]For example, in terms of the solution I offer in "Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?", the metaphysical problem is easily reinstated by amending (P_2) so that it refers specifically to an infallible *occurrent* belief.

[21]See, *e.g.*, John Martin Fischer, "Freedom and Foreknowledge," *Philosophical Review* 92 (1983) 67–79, and William Hasker, "Hard Facts and Theological Fatalism," *Nous* 22 (1988) 419–36.

the argument to exclude alternatives to what is infallibly foreknown. So there are two possibilities to be considered here. (1) If it is something *other* than their infallibility that makes God's forebeliefs soft, Ockhamism leaves the metaphysical problem intact. (P_2) will still be false, to be sure, but only because God is an exception to the general rule. Dropping (P_1) (or substituting for the theistic God an alternative and fictional deity whose infallible foreknowledge operates *via* beliefs which are hard as soon as they come into existence) and then exchanging (P_2) for

(P_2)′ If it is a hard fact at t_0 that at some earlier time there existed an infallible belief that X will A at t_1, then at no time $t \geq t_0$ is it possible for X to refrain from A-ing at t_1

will result in a new expression of the metaphysical problem that is immune to Ockhamism. (2) If, on the other hand, it is infallibility *itself* that makes an infallible belief about the future soft, then the Ockhamist strategy does address the metaphysical problem (indeed, [P_2]′ will then turn out to be self-contradictory). The weakness of this approach, however, is that infallibility seems an unpromising source of softness, particularly in comparison with mysterious features peculiar to God's noetic structure. In sum, the first challenge clearly ignores the metaphysical problem, while at least one (and possibly the strongest) version of the second challenge does so as well.[22]

III

What difference does it make that a particular response to the argument for theological fatalism turns out to address the theological problem but not the metaphysical problem? In the first place, and most obviously, it means that there is a problem that remains to be resolved and that the response in question therefore fails to take the full measure of the argument for theological fatalism. This consequence can be avoided only by denying that there is a metaphysical problem independent of the theological problem. Confronted with a theist who claims to have solved the theological problem to her own satisfaction by re-conceiving divine omniscience and who denies that there is an additional metaphysical problem that needs to be addressed, it would be hard to show that one *must* have the intuition expressed in (MP) or that one must take the intuition seriously enough for it to become an independent source of resistance to the argument: after all, initially intuitive claims often turn out to be false, and it is just possible that the argument for theological fatalism successfully demonstrates the falsity of (MP). But this is doubtful; at the very least we want some insight into why our intuitions mislead us regarding (MP), and this insight is not going to come *via* a re-consideration of

[22]A possible third challenge, lying between the first two (and thus between the argument's first two premises), is this. We must not think of infallible beliefs as just like fallible beliefs except that they are infallible—the same internally but with a different external relation to truth. There is an incoherence in the notion of an ordinary belief being infallible. To think of an infallible belief just *is* to think of a belief with whatever peculiarities render divine beliefs soft. Nelson Pike seems to be suggesting something along these lines in his "Fischer on Freedom and Foreknowledge," *Philosophical Review* 93 (1984) 599–614, where he claims to be correcting John Fischer's misunderstanding of Marilyn McCord Adams's position in her "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?".

(P_1). For those whose interest in the argument is primarily theological, William Lane Craig provides a better model for understanding the problem of theological fatalism. After citing Zeno's paradoxes of motion as examples of "ingenious" arguments with unacceptable conclusions, Craig continues as follows:

> In the same way, no matter how ingenious the argument, [theological] fatalism must be wrong. For it posits a constraint upon human freedom which is altogether unintelligible. The fatalist admits that our decisions and actions may be causally free—indeed, they could be utterly uncaused. Nevertheless, such actions are said to be constrained—but by what? Fate? What in the world is that? . . . How does the addition or deletion of the factor of God's simply knowing some act in advance affect the freedom of that act?[23]

This, of course, is the (rhetorical) question at the heart of the metaphysical problem, and it is not answered by re-conceiving God so that He does *not* know free acts in advance.

Another reason not to rest content with a purely theological response to the argument is that there are other problems in the neighborhood that have no essentially theological component, such as Newcomb's puzzle and the paradoxes of time-travel, and these neighboring problems should illuminate (and be illuminated by) thinking about the argument for theological fatalism. Just as theological fatalism asks us to imagine an action which satisfies to the highest degree the criteria for libertarian free agency and then introduces divine foreknowledge into the picture, so a typical time-travel dilemma asks us to imagine a similarly exemplary candidate for libertarian agency—say, X's A-ing at t_1—and then adds that a time-traveler who witnessed X's A-ing at t_1 has journeyed into the past carrying that knowledge with him. It is true that this case does not involve infallibility. But it is counterintuitive that X's free agency should depend on the fact that the time-traveler's foreknowledge is not strictly infallible. The infallibility problem should be continuous with this one—it should not be dismissible on grounds completely different from those available to the time-travel problem. The solutions to these problems, whatever they might be, should support each other. But this will not happen if the solution to theological fatalism ignores the metaphysical problem.

The most serious defect in a solution restricted to the theological problem, however, is not that it fails to address the metaphysical problem and others related to it, but that it cannot even provide a compelling solution to the theological problem. This follows from the fact that the theological problem arises from (P_1)-(P_3) and that its solution can therefore come from any of these premises, while the metaphysical problem (and its solution) are confined to (P_2)-(P_3). A solution to the metaphysical problem, then, is *ipso facto* a solution to the theological problem, while a solution to the theological problem need not provide any insight at all into the metaphysical problem (since it might locate the solution in [P_1]). This has important implications for those who (like Richard Swinburne and William Hasker) cite the argument for theological fatalism as a *reason* for rejecting (P_1). Insofar as there is a metaphysical problem to be dealt with, over and above a theological problem, there must be some flaw in (P_2)-(P_3); but this flaw (whatever it may be) is sufficient to generate both the metaphysical *and* the theological prob-

[23]William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987) pp. 68–69.

lem. Therefore the existence of this dual problem cannot necessitate a solution based on (P_1).[24] There may be good independent reasons for doubting (P_1) and moving toward a different conception of God from the one presupposed in the argument; but the argument itself is not one of them.[25]

IV

Imagine that there exists a powerful argument—as powerful as Pike's argument for theological fatalism—purporting to show that, if the Abominable Snowman exists, then no one is (libertarianly) free. (That there could be such an argument may not look very promising, but let us imagine it nonetheless.) In the face of this argument, there are basically two ways that one might try to turn aside the threat posed by "abominable fatalism." One is to deny the existence of the Abominable Snowman. This is surely a sensible response, and it does address a genuine worry raised by the argument (namely, that we might all be victims of abominable fatalism). If the Abominable Snowman does not exist, our free agency is secure (from this direction at least). At the same time, this first response fails to get to the heart of what must be wrong with the argument for abominable fatalism. How could it possibly follow from the existence of the Abominable Snowman that no one is libertarianly free? There *must* be something wrong with the argument connecting antecedent with consequent, and the second response is to meet the argument head-on by uncovering the mistake on which it rests. Once this flaw is exposed, there is no longer any reason to worry about abominable fatalism, whether or not the Abominable Snowman exists.

The logic of abominable fatalism obviously provides a parallel (somewhat exaggerated, to be sure) to the way that I have understood the logic of theological fatalism in this paper. Both arguments base a denial of libertarian freedom on the existence of a particular being; neither argument is obviously unsound (this is of course simply stipulated in the case of the fictional argument for abominable fatalism!). Both arguments therefore pose problems for believers in the posited beings. For Abominable Snowman enthusiasts whose faith would be shaken by any linkage between the Snowman and fatalism, there is an *abominable* problem of abominable fatalism, just as there is a *theological* problem of theological fatalism for theists who regard fatalism as an unacceptable concomitant to belief in God. But it is also highly counterintuitive that the existence of the Abominable Snowman should entail fatalism in the first place, just as it is counterintuitive that the existence of an infallibly omniscient deity should entail fatalism. Thus in each case there is a metaphysical problem that goes beyond the special problem posed for

[24]This is borne out in Stump and Kretzmann, who (alone among those cited in notes 12 and 13 above) go beyond a rejection of (P_1) to offer a solution that speaks to the metaphysical problem as well. The latter involves denying that (libertarian) freedom requires avoidability. But if (P_3) is thus rejected, the theological problem collapses along with the metaphysical, and there is no work left to be done by the "eternity solution" and its rejection of (P_1). David Widerker offers a similar assessment of the Stump-Kretzmann position in his "Providence, Eternity, and Human Freedom: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994) 242–54; see 248. I differ from Widerker in thinking that Stump and Kretzmann take the right line on the metaphysical problem. See my "Frankfurt Counterexamples: Some Comments on the Widerker-Fischer Debate," *Faith and Philosophy* (1996) 395–401.

[25]Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann offer such reasons on behalf of their own revision of this conception. See their "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981) 429–58.

believers. This metaphysical problem is the more central of the two. The real interest of an argument for abominable fatalism, at least for philosophers, would lie not so much in what it tells us about the existence of abominable snowmen (and about abominable fatalism) but in the opportunity it gives us to refine our understanding of the key concepts and assumptions that make this fallacious argument so seductive. And the same is true of the argument for theological fatalism.

If I am right in thus distinguishing between the theological and metaphysical problems raised by the argument for theological fatalism, this analysis has important implications for how we should assess each premise's potential contribution toward neutralizing the argument. Let me summarize, by way of conclusion, what I have already said about the argument's first two premises and then add a couple of comments on the third premise.

Premise (P_1). This premise is simply irrelevant to the metaphysical problem. Denying the premise cannot make the metaphysical problem go away; and while a theologically suitable amendment to (P_1) might make the *theological* problem disappear, its doing so cannot be cited as a reason for endorsing the amendment (since there will always be at least one more solution to the theological problem, namely, one that encompasses the metaphysical problem as well). Insofar as there is a metaphysical problem to be dealt with, over and above a theological problem, rejecting (P_1) cannot be the final word on the argument; but the final word on the argument (whatever that might be) would obviate the need for rejecting (P_1).

Premise (P_2). This premise *is* relevant to the metaphysical problem, but rejecting it puts the problem to rest only if the problem cannot be resuscitated with the aid of some substitute premise. Assuming that the Ockhamist analysis of divine forebeliefs as soft facts about the past offers the best (and perhaps the only) chance for falsifying this premise, it is of some importance whether these beliefs are soft because they are infallible or for some other reason. Infallibility plays an essential role in the argument. If infallibility is also the source of the softness of God's forebeliefs, an essential constituent of the argument guarantees that one of its premises is false. This would defeat the metaphysical problem (and the theological problem along with it) without possibility of resuscitation. If, on the other hand, it is something other than their infallibility that makes divine forebeliefs soft, the metaphysical problem can be reincarnated *via* a modification of (P_2) which specifically excludes this soft-making feature while retaining the infallibility that drives the argument. The moral here is that Ockhamists should focus on infallibility as the source of the soft facthood that they ascribe to divine forebeliefs. Despite its *prima facie* implausibility, this strategy is the only one that permits Ockhamism to resolve the metaphysical as well as the theological problem of theological fatalism.

Premise (P_3). This premise is also clearly relevant to the metaphysical problem, but it has largely escaped scrutiny in the literature. There are at least a couple of reasons for this. In the first place, much of the literature has been devoted to the proposition that perfectly adequate responses to the argument are available in premises (P_1) and (P_2). This reason for ignoring (P_3) is undermined by the existence of a metaphysical problem in addition to a theological problem since (P_1) makes no contribution to the metaphysical problem while (P_2) does so only on the controversial supposition that infallibility entails softness. This should make (P_3) much more attractive as a place to look for the fallacy underlying the argument. In the

second place, it is widely recognized that only the libertarian concept of free agency, with its requirement of alternate possibilities, is threatened by divine foreknowledge, so that altering (P_3) to the standards of some *other* concept of free agency is not so much solving the problem of theological fatalism as it is abandoning it.[26] Recently, however, this assumption has begun to be challenged in the literature, as libertarians have re-assessed their traditional commitment to the "principle of alternate possibilities." This re-assessment opens up the possibility that, just as (P_1) might reflect a mistaken idea of the theistic God, so (P_3) might embody a confused notion of what libertarian freedom requires. So (P_3) may be available for revision after all.[27]

In sum, the recognition of a metaphysical problem alongside the theological problem has important implications for proposed solutions to the problem of theological fatalism. It exposes the irrelevance of solutions based on (P_1). It does the same for (P_2)-based solutions which appeal to exceptional features of the Divine Mind. Finally, it focuses renewed attention on (P_3) and provides encouragement to those libertarians who regard the problem of theological fatalism as springing from a mistaken commitment to the principle of alternate possibilities.[28]

[26]See William P. Alston, "Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985) 19–32.

[27]For libertarian revisions of (P_3), see, *e.g.*, Eleonore Stump, "Intellect, Will, and the Principle of Alternate Possibilities" in *Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Michael Beaty (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1990) pp. 254–85; and Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991) ch. 6, §2.1. In my "Augustine on Theological Fatalism" I argue that this was Augustine's solution to the problem of theological fatalism.

[28]How can a position on free will which denies alternate possibilities nevertheless count as libertarian? One way is to continue insisting on causal indeterminism. Since infallible beliefs rule out alternatives to what is believed without causally necessitating what is believed, the "new" libertarianism can accept divinely foreknown actions as free without collapsing into soft determinism. This possibility was left open by Harry Frankfurt in his well-known article "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 46 (1969) 828–39, which stimulated much of the current re-thinking by libertarians. See also John Martin Fischer's "Responsibility and Control," *Journal of Philosophy* 89 (1982) 24–40, which clarifies the maneuvering room left open to libertarians by Frankfurt's argument. In "Frankfurt Counterexamples" I discuss the relevance of Frankfurt's denial of the principle of alternate possibilities to the argument for theological fatalism. An important challenge to a libertarian rejection of (P_3) may be found in Fischer's recent book, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), where he argues that there can be no independent motivation for an insistence on causal indeterminism once the principle of alternate possibilities is abandoned.