

Foreknowledge Without Determinism

Nathan Rockwood¹

Published online: 10 November 2017
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2017

Abstract A number of philosophers and theologians have argued that if God has knowledge of future human actions then human agents cannot be free. This argument rests on the assumption that, since God is essentially omniscient, God cannot be wrong about what human agents will do. It is this assumption that I challenge in this paper. My aim is to develop an interpretation of God's essential omniscience according to which God can be wrong even though God never is wrong. If this interpretation of essential omniscience is coherent, as I claim it is, then there is a logically consistent position according to which God is essentially omniscient, God foreknows what human agents will do, and yet it is possible for human agents to do otherwise. Thus, the argument for theological fatalism fails.

Keywords Fatalism · Divine Foreknowledge · Free Will · Divine Attributes

The Problem

A number of philosophers and theologians have argued that if God has knowledge of future human actions then human agents cannot be free.¹ That is, they argue propositions of the following type are inconsistent:

1. At t_1 God believes that A will do x at t_2 .
2. At t_2 it is possible for A to refrain from doing x .

Yet (1) is not simply the negation of (2), and so these propositions by themselves are not contradictory. Any implicit contradiction between them must therefore depend on

¹It is assumed in this context that a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for human freedom is the metaphysical possibility of doing otherwise.

✉ Nathan Rockwood
nathan_rockwood@byu.edu

¹ Department of Philosophy, Brigham Young University, Provo, USA

some further premises. One additional assumption needed to derive a contradiction concerns the nature of divine foreknowledge:

3. God cannot be wrong.

Given that God *cannot* be wrong, and at t_1 God knows that A will do x at t_2 , it seems to follow that at t_2 A *cannot* refrain from doing x . So the argument makes the further claim:

4. If at t_1 God believes that A will do x at t_2 , and God cannot be wrong, then at t_2 it is not possible for A to refrain from doing x .

Propositions (1), (3), and (4) entail the negation of (2). Hence, divine foreknowledge and human freedom are thought to be inconsistent. Call this position theological fatalism.²

However, in order for (1) and (2) to be *inconsistent*, the additional assumptions appealed to must be *necessary* truths. Theological fatalism is not merely claiming that the conjunction of (1) and (2) is contingently false; the claim is that it is *impossible* for (1) and (2) both be true. Suppose, for example, that (3) and (4) were merely contingently true. In that case, at least insofar as the theological fatalist has shown, it would be logically consistent to accept (1) and (2) while denying (3) and (4). By contrast, if (3) and (4) are necessary truths, and (1) is true, then (2) must be false since, as explained above, (1), (3), and (4) entail the negation of (2). The lesson here is this: in order for the argument for theological fatalism to succeed the additional assumptions (3) and (4) must be *necessary* truths.³ But (3), as it is usually understood, is not a necessary truth, or so I shall argue.

In Nelson Pike's influential article "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," he argues that (4) is a necessary truth. For suppose God cannot be wrong and at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 . Pike claims that it is an "analytic truth" that if in this case Jones had the ability to do otherwise, then Jones must thereby have the ability to change the past: at t_2 , Jones must either change the fact that at t_1 God believed that Jones will do x at t_2 , or change the fact that at t_1 the person who believed that Jones will do x at t_2 is God. But it is impossible for Jones to change the past in this way (Pike 1965, p. 34). Pike concludes that, necessarily, if at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 , and God cannot be wrong, then at t_2 it is not possible for Jones to refrain from doing x ; that is, (4) is a necessary truth.

There has been considerable debate about whether Pike is right to claim that (4) is a necessary truth. Ockhamism (cf. Adams 1967; Plantinga 1986), which has been the most influential reply to Pike's argument, contests the claim that at t_2 there is nothing

² While I will be concerned with the argument stated above, it is possible to arrive at the same conclusion by means of a different argument. Johnson (2009), for example, argues that God knows true propositions about future human actions and that the truth of those propositions entails that humans cannot do otherwise. For a reply to the kind of argument Johnson advances, see Smith and Oaklander (1995).

³ In *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Plantinga shows that in order to prove that the proposition "God is omnipotent and perfectly good" is implicitly contradictory with the proposition "evil exists" any additional premise(s) needed to derive a contradiction must be necessarily true (Plantinga 1974, pp. 12–16). The same point applies here.

Jones can do to change the truth of the proposition “at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 .” Ockhamism distinguishes between two kinds of past facts. Hard facts are past facts that are fixed and settled, meaning that nothing can happen in the future to change the truth of these past facts. For example, nothing can happen in the future to change the fact that “Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon.” Intuitively, though, the future is open in a way that the past is not. The proposition “Jones will do x at t_2 ” is about the future, and the future is not yet settled, and so the truth of the proposition “Jones will do x at t_2 ” is not yet settled. Similarly, soft facts are past facts that are (in part) about the future, and so (like present facts about the future) the truth value of these past facts are not yet settled. For example, since it is not yet settled that “Jones will do x on July 10, 2951,” it is not yet settled whether “Jones will do x three thousand years after Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon.” This proposition is partly about the past, since it makes a claim about when Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon; but the proposition is also about the future action of Jones. Consequently, the truth of this proposition is not yet settled; that is, there is something that *could* happen in the future to make the proposition false. Ockhamism holds that “at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 ” is a soft fact. In particular, Ockhamism insists that there is something Jones can do at t_2 to change the truth value of the proposition “at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 .” On this way of looking at the issue, the success of Pike’s argument that (4) is a necessary truth depends on whether God’s past belief is a hard fact or a soft fact, with Pike claiming the former and proponents of Ockhamism claiming the latter.

My response to the argument for theological fatalism sidesteps this whole controversy. To see why this is so, consider an analogy to human foreknowledge. Suppose that at t_1 Smith believes that Jones will do x at t_2 . Everyone grants that at t_2 there is nothing Jones can do to change what it is that Smith believed at t_1 , so Smith’s past belief is a hard fact about the past. Is it nonetheless possible for Jones to do otherwise? Certainly. For there are two possible worlds:

W_1 : at t_1 Smith believes that Jones will do x at t_2 , and Jones does so

W_2 : at t_1 Smith believes that Jones will do x at t_2 , and Jones does *not* do so

Smith’s belief that Jones will do x at t_2 is true in W_1 , but false in W_2 . Since it is possible for Smith’s belief to be false, Smith’s belief that Jones will do x at t_2 does not rule out the possibility of Jones doing otherwise. Similarly, I can grant to Pike the claim that God’s belief at t_1 that Jones will do x at t_2 is a hard fact, so there is nothing Jones can do at t_2 to change what it is that God believed at t_1 . Yet, as Pike and others realize, it does not immediately follow from this that Jones cannot do otherwise. For if it were possible for God to hold a false belief, then there would be two possible worlds where God holds the relevant belief:

W_1 : at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 , and Jones does so

W_2 : at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 , and Jones does *not* do so

If God *can* be wrong then God’s past belief (like Smith’s) does not entail that Jones will do x at t_2 , and consequently it would be possible for Jones to do otherwise. For this reason, it is only when we assume that God *cannot* be

wrong that divine foreknowledge threatens the possibility of Jones doing otherwise (Pike 1965, pp. 42–45; cf. Fischer 1983, p. 70). For me, then, the issue is not about whether God's past belief is a hard fact or a soft fact; the debate is about whether it is possible for God to be wrong.

Instead of challenging step (4) of the argument for theological fatalism, I will challenge step (3). Nearly everyone, both those arguing for and against theological fatalism, assumes that God's essential omniscience entails that (3) God cannot be wrong. But, I will argue, this is a mistake. My aim is to develop an interpretation of God's essential omniscience according to which God *can* be wrong even though God *never is* wrong. This interpretation of God's essential attributes has already been adopted in the literature. Indeed, it is Pike's own interpretation of essential attributes. While giving an analysis of God's being essentially and perfectly good, Pike argues that (in some sense) God *can* sin even though God *never does* sin (Pike 1969). I will adopt this same analysis of God's essential attributes and conclude that (in some sense) God *can* be wrong even though God *never is* wrong. Pike, at least, ought to be sympathetic to the point. Moreover, if I am right that God can be essentially omniscient even though it is possible for God to hold a false belief, then (as with the case of Smith above) everyone will have to concede that divine foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom.

It may be worth pointing out that this account of essential attributes suggests that it is a contingent fact that God exists. It may be tempting to dismiss my solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge precisely because it adopts this (potentially) objectionable theological position. But the solution here should not be lightly dismissed for several reasons. First, many prominent philosophers believe that God's existence is contingent.⁴ Second, the premises of the argument for theological fatalism make no explicit appeal to God's necessary existence, and so if the argument were sound then it should make no difference as to whether God's existence is necessary or contingent. Indeed, one of the most prominent proponents of the argument for theological fatalism, John Fischer, claims that the argument would work even if we adopt the account of essential attributes presented here (Fischer 1989, pp. 87–88). I will argue below that, contrary to what Fischer claims, this interpretation of essential attributes would allow us to avoid a commitment to theological fatalism. Third, on a related point, the argument in this paper shows that, at the very least, the argument for theological fatalisms rests on a heretofore unrecognized (and controversial) assumption. Thus, even for those who do not wish to accept the position developed here because they take God's existence (if he exists at all) to be necessary, the argument in the paper nonetheless has an interesting result. Unlike some theists, however, it seems right to me that God's existence is contingent; I can imagine a world in which God does not exist, and I see no contradiction

⁴ John Hick (1960) and Richard Swinburne (1993) both deny that God's existence is broadly logically necessary. Also, Marilyn Adams (1967) and Nelson Pike (1969, 1970) accept the analysis of essential attributes described in this paper, so they appear to be committed to the view that God's existence is contingent.

in such a possibility (cf. Swinburne 1993, ch. 14). So far as I can tell, then, the position I develop here is not only interesting, but it may well be true.

Two Views of Essential Predication

Pike acknowledges that there are two ways understand essential predication (Pike 1969 and 1970; cf. Adams 1967). On one view, let us call it the strong view of essential predication, to say that “God is essentially P” is to say that “necessarily, *the person* who is God is P.” Assuming that “Yahweh” is the name of the person who is God, and God is essentially omniscient, the strong view is committed to the claim that Yahweh is necessarily omniscient. On this view, Yahweh is omniscient in every possible world, so Yahweh *cannot* be wrong. On another view, let us call it the Weak View of essential predication, to say that “God is essentially P” is to say that “necessarily, *whoever* is God is P.” On this view, God’s being essentially P entails that “if an individual is not P, then that individual is not God”; that is, in order for an individual to be God it is necessary for that individual to have property P. Thus in order for Yahweh to be God, Yahweh must have the property P. Yet Yahweh can have a property P without having it necessarily. On this view, for example, God’s essential omniscience entails that if Yahweh were not omniscient then would not be God, but if Yahweh were not omniscient he would still be Yahweh (i.e., he would still be the same person). So the weak view allows for the logical possibility that Yahweh is contingently P, that God is essentially P, and that Yahweh is God.

Interestingly, Pike argues that we ought to adopt the weak view with respect to God’s essential goodness (Pike 1969). There is a longstanding theological controversy over whether divine omnipotence is in conflict with divine goodness. On the one hand, if God is omnipotent then God can do anything (consistently describable). On the other hand, it is often thought that if perfect goodness is part of God’s essence then, not only is it the case that God *does not* sin, it seems that God *cannot* sin. So, goes this line of argument, either God is not omnipotent (i.e., cannot sin) or God is not essentially good (i.e., God can sin). Pike resolves this problem by distinguishing between two senses of “God cannot sin”:

5. The person who is God cannot sin.
6. Whoever is God cannot sin.

The strong view accepts (5a), but then there is something God cannot do and thus (it seems) God is not omnipotent. Pike suggests, therefore, that we reject (5a) and instead accept (5b). On Pike’s view, which is the weak view of essential goodness, it is necessary for Yahweh to be God that he does not sin, so in that sense (as specified by (5b)) “God cannot sin” is true; but it remains the case that the individual who is God (i.e., Yahweh) *can* sin. Pike concludes that, given the weak view, God can be both essentially good (as specified in (5b)) and omnipotent.

I want to make a similar point with respect to God's essential omniscience. As noted above, it is supposed to follow from God's essential omniscience that:

3. God cannot be wrong.

Yet we can now see that there are two ways to interpret the claim that "God cannot be wrong":

3a. The person who is God cannot be wrong.

3b. Whoever is God cannot be wrong.

The strong view is committed to (3a). I take it, though, that Pike's solution to the conflict between omnipotence and divine goodness provides independent motivation for rejecting (3a). Also, accepting (3a) may lead to theological fatalism, in which case theists who wish to maintain that God gave us free will have all the more reason to reject it. Be that as it may, there is one interpretation of essential omniscience that rejects (3a) and instead accepts only (3b).⁵ On the weak view, in order to be God it is necessary that Yahweh be omniscient, but Yahweh is only contingently omniscient. Given that Yahweh is contingently omniscient, Yahweh *can* be wrong. Yet given that in the actual world Yahweh is God, in the actual world Yahweh holds no false beliefs. Following Pike's lead, then, we can hold that God is essentially omniscient while also maintaining that Yahweh, the person who is God, *can* be wrong.

John Martin Fischer claims, "Nothing in Pike's proof...rests on adopting the weaker rather than the stronger interpretation of God's attributes" (Fischer 1989, pp. 87–88). Pike himself seems to acknowledge that the argument only works on the strong view (Pike 1970, pp. 55–56, 81–82), but he does not develop this suggestion. What I will now do is take another look at the argument for theological fatalism and shows that, contrary to what Fischer claims, if we accept the weak view then the argument fails.

The argument begins with the assumption that (1) at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 . Given the discussion above, this proposition can now be stated more precisely as:

1'. At t_1 the person who is God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 .

The argument then claims that since God *cannot* be wrong it is not possible for Jones to do otherwise. However, on the Weak View, the only sense in which the proposition "God cannot be wrong" is true is the following:

3b. Whoever is God cannot be wrong.

And we can accept 3b. and also accept:

3'. The person who is God *can* be wrong, but *never is* wrong.

⁵ Notice that (3a) entails (3b) but not vice versa. So although the strong view is also committed to (3b), I am interested in the view that accepts (3b) while rejecting (3a).

Propositions (1') and (3') entail that Jones *will* do x at t_2 . But of course this falls short of the theological fatalist's desired conclusion that at t_2 it is not possible for Jones to do otherwise. For, as pointed out above, since Smith can be wrong then (even if Smith's belief happens to be correct) it is still possible for Jones to do otherwise. Pike and others accept this. So if God likewise *can* be wrong, though in fact God *is not* wrong, then divine foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom.

Perhaps the proponent of the theological fatalism will suggest that the problem for human freedom will re-arise even on the weak view. I have suggested that there is a possible world in which Yahweh holds a false belief about what Jones will do and so Yahweh's belief at t_1 does not rule out the possibility of Jones doing otherwise at t_2 . However, it may be pointed out that there is no possible world in which at t_1 *someone* is God and holds a false belief about what Jones will do at t_2 . So, goes the argument, even if the individual who is God is fallible it nonetheless remains the case that God (across individuals in different possible worlds) is infallible, and thus God's belief at t_1 rules out the possibility of Jones doing otherwise at t_2 . In reply, though, note that in every case the believing is done by a fallible individual. Thus, there is no instance of someone believing at t_1 that Jones will do x at t_2 that rules out the possibility of his doing otherwise. Further, God (taken as different persons across possible worlds) is not rigid designator, and so it does not make sense to speak of God's beliefs being infallible when, in each case, it is a fallible person who does the believing. The weak view, then, rejects the infallibility claim that is needed to get the argument for theological fatalism going.

It is worth emphasizing that I have just refuted Pike's argument for theological fatalism on his own terms. Pike accepts the weak view of essential predication, and I have shown that on the weak view of essential predication "God is essentially omniscient" entails only (3'). Yet, by everyone's admission, (3') is too weak to secure the theological fatalist's conclusion that it is impossible for Jones to do otherwise. Pike, then, must concede that divine foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom.

However, not everyone will be satisfied with showing that Pike is wrong on his own terms. I imagine that many who find Pike's proof compelling do not accept the weak view (cf. Fischer 1983, p. 69). So in the next section, I will argue that the *mere possibility* of the weak view of essential predication being correct is sufficient to refute the argument for theological fatalism.

Two Objections

As I explained above, in order for the argument for theological fatalism to work (3) must be a *necessary truth*. The justification for (3) is supposed to be God's essential omniscience. However, there are two interpretations of God's essential omniscience, one of which accepts (3a) and the other of which accepts only (3b). Further, as we have seen, (3b) is compatible with human freedom. So there is one interpretation of God's essential omniscient that appears to be consistent and does not rule out the possibility of doing otherwise. The only hope for saving the argument for theological fatalism, then, is to show that (3a) is a necessary truth in a way that does not rely on the claim that God is essentially omniscient.

One kind of strategy for arguing that (3a) is a necessary truth is to claim that otherwise God's existence would be counterfactually dependent on human action, which is implausible. Marilyn Adams (1967) argues that, on the weak view, there is a possible world in which at t_1 Yahweh believes that Jones will do x and yet at t_2 Jones does otherwise. Of course, since being omniscient is a necessary condition of being God, in the world in which Yahweh holds a false belief he would not be God. So, Adams suggests, if Jones does do x at t_2 , as Yahweh believes, then Yahweh would be God; but if Jones does *not* do x at t_2 , as Yahweh believes, then Yahweh would *not* be God. If this is right, "at t_1 God exists" and "at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 " appear to be soft facts about the past because their truth values depend on what Jones will do in the future. Adams contends that such soft facts do not threaten the possibility of doing otherwise (Adams 1967, pp. 496–497). John Fischer objects, though, that Adams has made God's existence "dependent on human actions in an unacceptable way"; for "it is theologically implausible to suppose that any human agent is free so to act that the person who is actually God would not be God" (Fischer 1983, p. 79). So, goes the argument, (3a) must be accepted because otherwise God's existence is counterfactually dependent on what Jones will do. However, (3a) can be rejected without entailing this problematic implication.

I suggest that Yahweh's beliefs satisfy Nozick's sensitivity and safety requirements (Nozick 1981, pp. 172, 174):

sensitivity: if p were true, then S would believe it
 safety: if p were false, then S would *not* believe it

The basic idea here is that Yahweh's belief-forming process is such that he would believe that p if p were true and would *not* believe that p if p were false. So not only is Yahweh's belief concerning p correct in the actual world but it also *would* be correct in counterfactual situations. Yet, as Nozick emphasizes, satisfying these requirements is compatible with the possibility of error (Nozick 1981, pp. 173–174): Yahweh's belief that p can satisfy the sensitivity and safety requirements even if there is a (distant) possible world in which Yahweh holds a false belief about p . Thus, on my view, Yahweh's belief at t_1 that Jones will do x at t_2 does not rule out the possibility of Jones doing otherwise. Further, I can allow for this possibility without making God's existence dependent on what Jones will do. For while Adams holds that if Jones were to do otherwise at t_2 then Yahweh would have been wrong at t_1 (and so would not be God), I insist that if Jones were to do otherwise then Yahweh would have recognized this at t_1 and so refrained from forming the false belief that Jones will do x .

For the sake of clarity, it may be worth quickly reviewing the standard semantics of subjunctive conditionals (cf. Lewis 1973). A subjunctive conditional of the form "if A were true, then B *would* be true" is true if in the closest possible worlds in which A is true it is also the case that B is true. Suppose, then, Yahweh's belief that Jones will do x at t_2 satisfies the sensitivity and safety requirements. Satisfying the sensitivity requirement (if Jones were to do x at t_2 , then at t_1 Yahweh would believe that Jones will do x at t_2) means in the nearest possible worlds in which Jones does x at t_2 it is also the case that at t_1 Yahweh believes that Jones will do so. Satisfying the safety requirement (if Jones were to *not* do x at t_2 , then at t_1 Yahweh would *not* believe that Jones will do x at t_2) means that in the nearest possible worlds in which Jones does *not* do x it is also the

case that Yahweh does *not* believe that Jones will do x . In short, satisfying the sensitivity and safety requirements entails that in every nearby possible world Yahweh holds a true belief about what Jones will do. Yet, on my view, there remains a remote possibility (i.e., a distant possible world) in which at t_1 Yahweh forms a belief that Jones will do x at t_2 and yet Jones does otherwise.

The difference between my proposal and the proposal of Adams concerns the relative distance of non-actual possible worlds. Suppose in the actual world Jones will do x at t_2 . Adams and I agree that Yahweh's belief-forming process is sufficiently reliable to make it so that in the actual world Yahweh believes all and only true propositions, including the fact that Jones will do x at t_2 . The disagreement, then, is about what would be the case if Jones were *not* to do x at t_2 . There are at least two such possible worlds:

W_1 : at t_1 Yahweh does *not* believe that Jones will do x at t_2 , and t_2 Jones does *not* do x

W_2 : at t_1 Yahweh believes that Jones will do x at t_2 , and t_2 Jones does *not* do x

According to Adams, if Jones were to do otherwise at t_2 then Yahweh would hold a false belief; moreover, she needs this to be the case in order to claim that God's existence at t_1 is a soft fact. Thus Adams takes W_2 to be the closest possible world in which Jones does not do x . By contrast, my view is that Yahweh's belief is so reliable that not only are all of Yahweh's beliefs correct in the actual world but they *would* be correct in all the nearby possible worlds. In particular, if Jones were to refrain from doing x at t_2 then at t_1 Yahweh would not believe that Jones will do x at t_2 (this follows from Yahweh's satisfying the safety requirement). Thus on my view, unlike on Adams' view, if Jones were to refrain from doing x at t_2 then Yahweh would still be God. This allows me to deny that "at t_1 God existed" counterfactually depends on what Jones will do at t_2 .

(It may be worth pointing out here the similarity my position has with Plantinga's version of Ockhamism. Plantinga and I agree that what Yahweh believes at t_1 is counterfactually dependent on what Jones will do at t_2 . However, Plantinga makes the further assumption that Yahweh cannot be wrong. He then argues that, since God's believing at t_1 that p entails that p , if p is about the future then God's believing at t_1 that p cannot be a hard fact (Plantinga 1986, pp. 248–249). So if God's belief concerns the future action of Jones, and it remains open for Jones to do otherwise, then what God believes at t_1 about Jones's future action must be a soft fact. I reject the infallibility assumption in this argument, so I am not committed to saying that what Yahweh believes about the future action of Jones is a soft fact. Indeed, Plantinga holds that if Yahweh can be wrong then facts about his past beliefs would be hard facts (Plantinga 1986, p. 250). The difference between our views might be put this way. Plantinga insists that, because Yahweh's past belief about what Jones will do is a soft fact that depends on the future action of Jones, at t_2 Jones has the power to change Yahweh's past belief. By contrast, on my view, what Jones has the power to do at t_2 is act such that Yahweh holds a false belief. So even though Plantinga and I agree that Yahweh's belief at t_1 that Jones will do x at t_2 is counterfactually dependent

on Jones doing x at t_2 , our approaches to solving the problem of divine foreknowledge remain quite different.)

The upshot from this discussion is that Fischer's counterfactual dependence objection does not show that (3a) is a necessary truth. If Yahweh's belief-forming process satisfies the sensitivity and safety requirements, then whether Yahweh is God does not depend on what Jones will do. I can therefore consistently claim that there is a possible world in which Yahweh holds a false belief about what Jones will do, and yet deny the claim that whether Yahweh is God depends on what Jones will do. Thus rejecting (3a) remains a live possibility.

The most promising strategy for arguing that (3a) is a necessary truth is to appeal to the ontological argument and related considerations. This argument intends to show that God, the greatest possible being (or some variant thereof), necessarily exists (e.g., Plantinga 1974). An important assumption of the argument is that necessary existence contributes to God's greatness; indeed, if God did not exist necessarily then God would not be the greatest possible being. Two conclusions might be drawn from this assumption. It might be thought that God's greatness entails that God necessarily exists and so *does* exist. Alternatively, it might be thought that God's greatness entails that *if* God exists then he exists necessarily. Either way, assuming that "God" here refers to a unique individual, it could then be concluded that there are no possible worlds in which Yahweh exists and holds a false belief. Hence, (3a) is a necessary truth: Yahweh *cannot* be wrong.

It is not obvious, though, that necessary existence contributes to God's greatness. First, it is not obvious to me that existence *per se* is a perfection. In my view, it is only insofar as God is good that it is better that he exists. If this is right, necessary existence *per se* does not contribute to God's greatness. Second, it is not clear that having a perfection in every possible world is "greater" than having a perfection in only some possible worlds. I do think that part of what makes Yahweh great in the actual world is that his beliefs are not only true in the actual world but they *would* be true in other nearby possible worlds. Taken to the extreme, this thought might lead one to assert that being omniscient in *every* possible world is "greater" than being omniscient in every *nearby* possible world (cf. Plantinga 1974, pp. 107–108). However, if there is a distant possible world in which Yahweh holds a false belief, this does not, in my judgment, detract from his greatness in the actual world. By extension, it is not obvious to me that Yahweh's greatness is impugned if there is a distant possible world in which Yahweh does not exist (as God).

It is not my aim here to settle this issue; rather, I am pointing out that this defense of (3a) makes a substantive assumption that might reasonably be denied. If the assumption is rejected, then that opens the door for the weak view of essential predication according to which Yahweh could be wrong but never is wrong. But even if this defense of (3a) is accepted, it is worth noting that the success of the argument for theological fatalism depends on this heretofore unrecognized assumption.

So can theological fatalists show that (3a) is a necessary truth? The justification universally appealed to is that God is essentially omniscient, but this decisively fails since God's essential omniscience entails only (3b). Fischer argues that (3b) makes God's existence counterfactually dependent on what Jones will do, but I have shown that this does not need to be the case. There is a logically consistent position which accepts (3b) and yet denies that God's existence counterfactually depends on what

Jones will do. The most promising strategy is appealing to the ontological argument (or relevantly similar considerations), but it is not clear that this argument is ultimately successful. Perhaps there is some other strategy I have not thought of yet, but I am skeptical that any alternative strategy will succeed. For anyone who wants to take up the mantle, good luck. As things stand now, theological fatalists have not shown that (3a) is a necessary truth.

The argument for theological fatalism will only work if it is a necessary truth that the person who is God *cannot* be wrong. But I have argued that this is not a necessary truth (or, at least, the theological fatalist has not yet shown that it is a necessary truth). It appears, then, that I can consistently maintain that God is essentially omniscient, yet God can be wrong, and consequently that even if at t_1 God believes that Jones will do x at t_2 it is nonetheless possible for Jones to do otherwise. In other words, divine foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank David Hunt, Per Milam, Derk Pereboom, Tristram McPherson, Samuel Rickless, and anonymous referees for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I also thank Jay Burkette, Jonathan Cohen, John Fischer, Tarun Menon, Kelly Trogdon, and my audience at the UCSD Graduate Conference (2009) for helpful discussions about some of the ideas I present in this paper.

References

- Adams, M. M. (1967). Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact? *Philosophical Review*, 76(4): 492-503.
- Fischer, J. M. (1983). Freedom and foreknowledge. *Philosophical Review*, 92(1): 67-79.
- Hick, J. (1960). God as necessary being. *Journal of Philosophy*, 57(22/23): 725-734.
- Johnson, D. K. (2009). God, fatalism, and temporal ontology. *Religious Studies*, 45(4): 435-454.
- Lewis, D. (1973). *Counterfactuals*. Harvard University Press.
- Nozick, R. (1981). *Philosophical explanations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Pike, N. (1965). Divine omniscience and voluntary action. *Philosophical Review*, 74(1): 27-46.
- Pike, N. (1969). Omnipotence and God's ability to sin. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 6(3): 208-216.
- Pike, N. (1970). *God and timelessness*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Plantinga, A. (1986). An Ockham's way out. *Faith and Philosophy*, 3(3): 235-269.
- Plantinga, A. (1974). *God, freedom, and evil*. New York: Harper & Rowe.
- Smith, Q., & Oaklander, L. N. (1995). *Time, change, and freedom: an introduction to metaphysics*. London: Routledge.
- Swinburne, R. (1993). *The coherence of theism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.