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## DOES THEOLOGICAL FATALISM REST ON AN EQUIVOCATION?

David P. Hunt

**T**HEOLOGICAL fatalism is the position that (libertarianly) free agency is incompatible with the existence of an everlasting and essentially omniscient being.<sup>1</sup> The classic argument for this conclusion begins with the supposition that an individual—call him “Jones”—performs an action—say, mowing his lawn—at some time  $t_3$ .<sup>2</sup> For this action to be (libertarianly) free, there must be some time  $t_2$ , no later than  $t_3$ , at which Jones has the power to refrain from mowing his lawn at  $t_3$ . Now Jones cannot have the power at  $t_2$  to refrain from mowing his lawn at  $t_3$  if his so refraining would be incompatible with the past relative to  $t_2$ , for the past must be regarded as a given which no one (later) has the power to avert. Suppose, however, that there exists an everlasting and essentially omniscient being (call such a being “God”). In virtue of God’s *omniscience* He knows that Jones mows his lawn at  $t_3$ ; in virtue of His *everlastingness* He knows this at some time  $t_1$  prior to  $t_2$ ; and in virtue of His *essential* omniscience He not only *is* not but *could* not be mistaken in what He cognizes. But then something (namely, a divine cognition) is both past relative to  $t_2$  and also incompatible with Jones’s refraining from mowing his lawn at  $t_3$ . So Jones does not have the power at  $t_2$  to refrain from mowing his lawn at  $t_3$ ; nor does he ever have this power, since any time at which he might have it is preceded by a time at which an essentially omniscient being exists. Since the argument can be generalized, it follows that neither Jones nor anyone is ever (libertarianly) free with respect to any action, on the assumption of an everlasting and essentially omniscient being.

The conception of divine knowledge at work in this argument includes the core meaning of omniscience as all-knowingness, viz.,

(K1)  $(x)[x \text{ is omniscient} \rightarrow (p)(p \rightarrow x \text{ knows that } p)]$ ,

supplemented by an inerrancy condition to the effect that

(K2)  $(x)[x \text{ is omniscient} \rightarrow (p)(x \text{ believes that } p \rightarrow p)]$ .

Now divine omniscience, so understood, is able to play its assigned role in the above argument only because (i) it entails that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ , and (ii) it belongs to the fixed past relative to  $t_2$ . (The former follows from God’s being *essentially* omniscient, the latter from His being *always* omniscient.) The *it* in (i) and (ii) must be identified with some care, however, since pastness alone is no guarantee of fixity: while some facts about an earlier time are fixed at that time (the “hard” facts), others are not fixed until later (the “soft” facts). If the argument for theological fatalism is to succeed, divine foreknowledge must supply some *hard* fact which satisfies both (i) and (ii).<sup>3</sup>

There is considerable controversy over the right way to divide facts into hard vs. soft. I hope to finesse this controversy by reconceiving the relevant divine cognitions in such a way that their status with respect to hardness/softness is obvious, and thus adjudicable without appeal to the artificially precise formulae that are often thought necessary when dealing with this subject. Whether I can get away with this is of course another question.

My claim, in any case, is that an intuitive grasp of the hard-soft distinction is sufficient for the purposes of this paper. As it happens, foreknowledge scenarios provide a particularly fertile ground for soft facts. Suppose that Smith, an ordinary mortal, *knows* at  $t_1$  that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ . On the classical analysis of knowledge, Smith's knowing this entails that (a) he believes this, (b) his belief is true, and (c) his so believing satisfies some further condition(s) whose precise identity is controversial, but which in the present circumstances might be partially met by, e.g., Smith's intimate familiarity with Jones's habits. But then one of the conditions in virtue of which it is a fact that Smith knows at  $t_1$  that Jones will mow at  $t_3$  (rather than its being a fact that Smith *rationaly but mistakenly believes* at  $t_1$  that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ ) is not satisfied until  $t_3$ . If Jones's mowing at  $t_3$  is (libertarianly) free, then prior to  $t_3$  it must be possible for condition (b) to fail; thus the fact that Smith *knows* at  $t_1$  what Jones will do at  $t_3$  is a soft fact until  $t_3$  (and a hard fact thereafter). Now it certainly seems, at least *prima facie*, that the same reasoning would go through if it were *God* doing the foreknowing rather than Smith; and if so, it is a soft fact before  $t_3$  (and a hard fact after  $t_3$ ) that God's cognition of Jones's future mowing constitutes His *knowing* that Jones will mow. But then

(F1) God *knows* at  $t_1$  that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$

fails to capture that feature of the divine cognition in virtue of which (ii) is supposed to be true. What the argument for theological fatalism apparently requires, then, is some alternative to (F1).

The alternative fact proposed by defenders of the argument is

(F2) God *believes* at  $t_1$  that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ .

The claim that (F2) *is* a fact depends on the assumption that

(A1)  $(x)(p)(x \text{ knows that } p \rightarrow x \text{ believes that } p)$ .

Given (K1) and (A1), it follows that

(K3)  $(x)[x \text{ is omniscient} \rightarrow (p)(p \rightarrow x \text{ believes that } p)]$ .

This sanctions the claim that, if God exists and Jones mows his lawn at  $t_3$ , (F2) is true. Now if God is also essentially inerrant, as set forth in (K2), then (F2) entails that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ , thus satisfying condition (i). Unlike (F1), however, (F2) appears to satisfy condition (ii) as well. Belief, it would seem, is surely fixed as *the belief that p* (for some particular  $p$ ) at the time that the belief occurs. This assumption, which can be rendered as

(A2)  $(t)(u)(x)(p)(t \leq u \cdot x \text{ believes at } t \text{ that } p \rightarrow \text{it is a hard fact at } u \text{ that } x \text{ believes at } t \text{ that } p)$ ,

provides the final justification for the theological fatalist's claim that, if God exists and Jones mows his lawn at  $t_3$ , there is a hard fact about the past—namely, (F2)—that is incompatible with Jones's power to do otherwise.

Most critics of the argument deny one of the assumptions, (A1) and (A2), which make (F2) available for fatalistic employment. Such critics do not thereby deny that (A1) and (A2) are *generally* true—in particular, they do not deny (and indeed may insist upon) the fact that (A1) and (A2) are true for human cognizers.<sup>4</sup> Rather, they claim that for various reasons God is an *exception* to the general rule. William Alston, for example, has denied (A1) on the grounds that God's knowledge involves a direct awareness of reality which is unmediated by beliefs,<sup>5</sup> while defenders of the so-called "Ockhamist" strategy have denied (A2) on the grounds that divine beliefs, because they entail the truth of what is believed, are not hard until the believed events actually transpire.<sup>6</sup> Defenders of the argument, on the other hand, regard these as *ad hoc* moves with little to recommend them beyond their potential for undermining (F2).

What has not been noticed in this debate is that it is doubtful whether (A1) and (A2) are both true even in the case of *human* cognitions. If this claim is correct, critics of the argument may be able to escape (F2) without having to engage in special pleading on behalf of divine cognitions.

## I

While each of (A1) and (A2), taken by itself, does indeed seem true (at least in the human case), more than this is required if theological fatalism is to be established. If the argument is to avoid the fallacy of equivocation, both assumptions must be true *given the same concept of "belief"*. It is my contention that the argument for theological fatalism, as it has been developed thus far, fails to satisfy this requirement.

In general, to say of some person  $x$  that she believes at  $t$  that  $p$  does not imply that  $x$  is consciously entertaining  $p$  at  $t$  (though of course it may happen that  $x$  is consciously entertaining  $p$  at  $t$ ). "The belief that you reside at 3748 Hillview Road," observes Alvin Goldman, "may be held for many years, though you only 'think about' your address intermittently during this period,"<sup>7</sup> and David Armstrong notes how we may even "intelligibly attribute a current belief that the earth is round to a man who is sleeping dreamlessly or is unconscious."<sup>8</sup> Belief, we might say, can be *nonoccurrent* as well as *occurrent*. The significance of this fact was recognized as early as Plato, whose aviary metaphor in *Theaetetus* illustrates how one might (passively) "possess" a belief without (actively) "having" the belief (as one might be said to possess a caged bird despite not having it in one's grasp).<sup>9</sup> In taking over this distinction from Plato, Aristotle made the characteristic mark of the nonoccurrent believer—the sense in which he is a (kind of) *believer* rather than a simple non-believer—the fact that "he can in the absence of any external counteracting cause realize his knowledge in actual knowing at will."<sup>10</sup> Recent accounts of the distinction have tended to follow Aristotle on this score, treating non-occurrent belief as *dispositional* in nature. The following passage from John Pollock is typical:

For example, when I am not consciously thinking about mathematics, I still have the dispositional belief that two plus two is four. At least part of what this means is that whenever I consider the matter, I will have the occurrent belief that two plus two is four. In other words, a dispositional belief is one that can be made occurrent simply by considering the matter.<sup>11</sup>

On this account, for  $x$  to have at  $t$  the *occurrent* belief that  $p$  is for  $x$  consciously to affirm at  $t$  that  $p$ , while for  $x$  to have at  $t$  the nonoccurrent or *dispositional* belief that  $p$  is for  $x$  to be such that, *were* certain conditions to obtain at  $t$  (e.g., the conditions involved in  $x$ 's considering whether  $p$ ),  $x$  *would* at  $t$  have the occurrent belief that  $p$ . We will have occasion later to reconsider the adequacy of this account of the distinction; in the meantime, I suggest we adopt it as a working definition.<sup>12</sup>

Given these two concepts of belief, in what way is "belief" to be understood in (A1)? The fact is that we attribute knowledge to a person when *either* of these forms of belief is present (and the other conditions for knowledge are satisfied). I need not be consciously affirming that  $2+2=4$  for me to be said to *know* that  $2+2=4$ ; indeed, on most occasions when knowledge is correctly attributed to someone—e.g., that Fay knows the atomic number of tungsten, that Jay knows what day it is, that Ray knows whether Paris is larger than Moscow—the knower is *not* consciously affirming the belief in question. Thus it may well be true (for human cognizers at least) that

(A1)\*  $(x)(p)[x$  knows that  $p \rightarrow (x$  has an occurrent belief that  $p \vee x$  has a dispositional belief that  $p)]$ .

But it is simply false, as we have noted, that

(A1)'  $(x)(p)(x$  knows that  $p \rightarrow x$  has an occurrent belief that  $p)$ .

(A1) is acceptable, then, only if "belief" is being used in the standard sense (which covers both types of beliefs); it is not acceptable if "belief" is being used nonstandardly (to cover only occurrent beliefs). This creates a *prima facie* difficulty for the argument; for when we turn to (A2), the argument's other key assumption, we find that its intuitive force is most striking on the supposition that the belief in question is *occurrent* belief. That is, what is chiefly being accepted when assent is given to (A2) is

(A2)\*  $(t)(u)(x)(p)(t \leq u . x$  has at  $t$  an occurrent belief that  $p \rightarrow$  it is a hard fact at  $u$  that  $x$  has at  $t$  an occurrent belief that  $p)$ .

Since knowledge can also be dispositional in form, however, the success of the argument requires that

(A2)'  $(t)(u)(x)(p)(t \leq u . x \text{ has at } t \text{ a dispositional belief that } p \rightarrow \text{it is a hard fact at } u \text{ that } x \text{ has at } t \text{ a dispositional belief that } p)$

be true as well. But it's not clear that (A2)' is true.

What sort of fact is being located at  $t$  when it is said that  $x$  has at  $t$  a dispositional belief that  $p$ ? According to our working definition of dispositional belief, it is merely the fact that, were certain conditions to obtain at  $t$ ,  $x$  would have an occurrent belief that  $p$ . It may be easier to deny hard facthood in this case, where the connection with reality is a counterfactual one, than it is to deny it in the parallel case involving simple occurrent belief. Of course, the connection might not be merely counterfactual. Perhaps what makes the counterfactual true is that  $x$  is in a particular state at  $t$ , a state in virtue of which  $x$  has the (dispositional) belief that  $p$ ; and it may also be the case that  $x$ 's being in that state at  $t$  qualifies as a hard fact about  $t$ . (Compare, e.g., the case where  $x$  dispositionally believes that  $p$  in virtue of being in a particular *memory-state*.) But this will not serve to rehabilitate the argument for theological fatalism unless  $(\alpha)$  God's being in such a state entails  $p$ , and  $(\beta)$  all God's dispositional beliefs about future contingencies (if He has any) involve such states. Unfortunately, there is good reason to doubt that  $(\alpha)$  and  $(\beta)$  must both be true.

Suppose that God is simply such that, if  $p$  were in fact true and God were to consider whether  $p$ , He would form the occurrent belief that  $p$ , and if  $p$  were in fact false and God were to consider whether  $p$ , He would form the occurrent belief that not- $p$ . (If God has this ability for *all*  $p$ , we might say that He is "dispositionally omniscient.") Now suppose further that the  $p$  in question is true, that it concerns some future contingency, and that God is not at  $t$  occurrently believing that  $p$ . Then God satisfies the conditions for having at  $t$  a dispositional belief that  $p$ . Since we are supposing that there is nothing more to God's disposition to believe that  $p$  than the

power to form the right occurrent belief about  $p$ , coupled with the fact that  $p$  is true, the content of God's belief in this case (unlike the memory case) is determined, not by anything that is already in place at  $t$ , but *solely* by what happens later. So God's having this (dispositional) belief at  $t$ , rather than its denial, is apparently a *soft* fact about  $t$  until such time as the state of affairs set forth in  $p$  obtains. Furthermore, since the stipulated scenario is such that there is no difference in God's internal states between the situation in which  $p$  is the case and the situation in which not- $p$  is the case, either there is *no* state internal to God in virtue of which He believes at  $t$  that  $p$  (so that  $(\beta)$  is false), or else there *is* such a state but it does not entail  $p$  (so that  $(\alpha)$  is false). It appears, then, that there are conditions under which a (dispositional) belief about a future action may be attributed to God even though there is no available hard fact of the sort that is necessary if the argument for theological fatalism is to succeed.

Call these conditions, as set forth in the preceding paragraph, the "Dispositional Omniscience Scenario" (or "*DOS*" for short). Three objections to *DOS* are sufficiently serious to threaten its adequacy as a response to theological fatalism. The first is that *DOS* is simply a non-starter, since its proposed understanding of divine knowledge is theologically unacceptable; the second is that it remains doubtful whether the dispositional facts which are supposed to immunize *DOS* against theological fatalism are really soft; and the third is that such facts, whether hard or soft, are in any case irrelevant to the debate over theological fatalism, since they do not warrant attributing to God any beliefs at all about the future. This last is the really tough objection; but it will have to await its turn as I take up the three objections in order.

## II

I will be saying very little about the first of these objections. There are really two questions that have to be considered here: Is *DOS* in fact theologically unacceptable? And even if it were, would this in fact undermine its effectiveness against theological fatalism?

Regarding the first question, the objection presupposes that divine omniscience must be occurrent in nature if it is to square with classical theism. But this turns out upon examination to be far less obvious than one might think. Since I have dealt with this issue at length elsewhere, I shall say no more about it here.<sup>13</sup> As for the second question, the answer to it depends entirely on whether one understands the apparent conflict between divine foreknowledge and human freedom to be posing a narrowly theological or a broadly metaphysical problem. I will come back to this distinction and its significance in the last section of the paper. In the meantime, it is enough that the classic statements of the problem do not specify a particular form that divine omniscience must take, and so presumably leave that question open as part of the maneuvering room in which it is legitimate to seek a solution to the problem.

The second objection cannot be dismissed so lightly. The fact is that the literature is already filled with objections to theological fatalism based on claims that the relevant divine beliefs are really soft. Such objections fail to settle the issue because the key claims almost always beg the question against theological fatalism. Why think that *DOS*, which also construes a crucial fact as soft, is any different? Clearly more must be said on this score if the argument of the preceding section is to be at all persuasive.

This concern is best addressed by demonstrating that *DOS* does not rely on some contrived or partisan account of the hard-soft distinction, dubiously applied, but on intuitions integral to theological fatalism itself. As a representative expression of these intuitions, I suggest we look to the useful “incompatibilist constraint” formulated by a notable defender of the argument for theological fatalism, John Martin Fischer. An “incompatibilist” in this context is someone who asserts the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and free agency, and Fischer offers his incompatibilist constraint as a restriction on accounts of the hard-soft fact distinction which is designed to ensure that it cannot be drawn in such a way that theological fatalism is avoided. No one (to my knowledge) has

charged that Fischer’s constraint is too weak, though some (e.g., Jonathan Kvanvig<sup>14</sup>) have charged it with being too strong; so if *DOS* nevertheless succeeds in satisfying this constraint, it will provide crucial non-question-begging support for my claim that *DOS* does indeed avoid theological fatalism.

Fischer develops his constraint through an analysis of John Turk Saunders’ example of a paradigmatic soft fact:

Consider the fact that Caesar died 2,009 years prior to Saunders’s writing his paper. What lies behind our view that this fact is not a hard fact about 44 B.C.? We might say that it is a soft fact about 44 B.C. because one and the same physical process would have counted as Caesar’s dying 2,009 years prior to Saunders’s writing his paper, if Saunders wrote his paper in 1965, and would *not* have counted as Caesar’s dying 2,009 years prior to Saunders’s writing his paper, if Saunders had not written his paper in 1965. This captures the “future dependence” of soft facts; a soft fact is a fact *in virtue* of events which occur in the future.<sup>15</sup>

Having made this point about the nature of soft facts, Fischer then draws out the moral for divine foreknowledge:

Thus an incompatibilist might insist on the following sort of constraint on an account of the hard fact/soft fact distinction: the only way in which God’s belief at  $t_1$  about Jones at  $t_3$  could be a soft fact about the past relative to  $t_2$  would be if one and the same state of the mind of the person who was God at  $t_1$  would count as one belief if Jones did  $x$  at  $t_3$  but a different belief (or not a belief at all) if Jones did not do  $x$  at  $t_3$ .<sup>16</sup>

The same idea finds expression, either explicitly or implicitly, in other leading “incompatibilists,”<sup>17</sup> and Nelson Pike calls Fischer’s formulation of it “as clear a statement as one could have of the intuition underpinning the hard/soft distinction generally as well as the intuition underpinning the conviction that past belief-events (including divine belief-events) must be counted as full-fledged constituents of the ‘hard’ past.”<sup>18</sup> Coming as it does with all the right endorsements, Fischer’s constraint, if accepted as a stricture on our own account, should go a long way toward pre-empting the charge of question-begging.

The question is whether dispositional foreknowledge must violate this constraint. The answer, however, appears to be *no*. Suppose God is dispositionally omniscient, so that

(F3) God possesses at  $t_1$  a disposition to believe that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ .

Now in order for (F3) to provide a purchase for theological fatalism, it must satisfy the two conditions laid down for that purpose near the beginning of this paper; that is, (F3) must be such that (i) it entails that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ , and (ii) it belongs to the fixed past relative to  $t_2$ . But if God's dispositional omniscience operates in accordance with *DOS*, what makes (F3) true is nothing more than the conjunction of

(F4) God possesses at  $t_1$  an infallible capacity for anticipating whether Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ ,

together with the fact that

(F5) Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ .

So construed, (F3) does satisfy condition (i), since (F5) does so; but (F3) does not satisfy condition (ii). While (F4) is indeed a hard fact about the past relative to  $t_2$ , (F5) is a paradigm of a soft fact relative to  $t_2$ , and the conjunction of a hard fact with a soft fact is a soft fact. (F3), therefore, insofar as it exemplifies *DOS*, is a soft fact relative to  $t_2$ .

This in itself is not decisive, for (as Fischer himself was soon arguing) *even if* God's having held a belief in the past about an event that is still future comes out soft on some acceptable construal of the distinction between hard and soft facts, such a soft fact might contain a "hard component" and this hard component might entail the future event.<sup>19</sup> So the argument for theological fatalism would go through as before, based now not on the "soft fact" about God's past belief, but on its hard component. This is relevant to *DOS* in that (F3) appears to be a soft fact with a hard component, the hard component being (F4). (F4), however, cannot take the place of (F3) in an argument for theological fatalism. Unlike the "hard-hearted" soft facts that Fischer apparently had in mind, (F4) does not entail the future event: it is neutral on the question

whether Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ . Whether (F4) constitutes the disposition to believe that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$  or the disposition to believe that Jones will not mow his lawn at  $t_3$  depends on (F5), and (F5) is a soft fact (soft all the way through) relative to  $t_2$ . So if God is dispositionally omniscient in the way set forth in *DOS*, those facts about the Divine Mind in virtue of which God has dispositional knowledge of Jones's future actions *would* count as different (dispositional) beliefs depending on how Jones acts at  $t_3$ . Thus Fischer's constraint is respected.

I conclude that *DOS* satisfies any reasonable account of soft facthood, obviating the need for actually contriving and justifying such an account. The most serious charge against *DOS*, however, is not that it fails to render the crucial facts soft, but that it renders those facts in such a way that they cannot possibly constitute knowledge. Rebutting this charge is the business of the next section.

### III

Supposing that God's disposition under *DOS* to hold a particular belief about the future need not involve any hard facts that are inconsistent with the future turning out differently, this does nothing to solve the original problem unless it is now possible to ascribe to God nonfatalistic knowledge of the future. But knowledge entails belief, and the "dispositionally prescient" God of *DOS* does not appear to hold any beliefs at all about future contingencies. Of course, *DOS* recognizes (indeed, it stipulates) that God does not hold an *occurrent* belief that Jones will (freely) mow his lawn at  $t_3$ ; its claim is rather that God may hold a *nonoccurrent* belief that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ . What *DOS* offers to ground this claim is simply the conjunction of (F4) and (F5). But this is not enough: while it is plausible to regard the conjunction of (F4) and (F5) as entailing a *disposition to believe* that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ , nothing about (F4) and/or (F5) makes it at all plausible to regard this disposition as a *dispositional belief* that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ .<sup>20</sup> Yet it is critical to *DOS*'s evasion of theological

fatalism that God's disposition to believe that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$  amount to nothing more than the conjunction of (F4) and (F5). *DOS*, then, appears to involve a simple denial of divine foreknowledge, and it should come as no surprise that one can thwart the argument for theological fatalism by rejecting this essential premise.

*DOS* clearly satisfies our earlier working definition of dispositional belief; so if the concerns set forth in the last paragraph are well-founded, that definition is evidently flawed. Alvin Goldman, commenting on the counterintuitive consequences of "simply defin[ing] a dispositional belief in terms of subjunctives or counterfactuals," suggests that what such a definition misses is the following necessary condition on any belief, occurrent or dispositional: "To say that a person believes proposition  $p$  at  $t$  is to say that  $p$  is somehow lodged in the mind at  $t$ —in memory if not in consciousness."<sup>21</sup> This expresses what I take to be the intuition behind the complaints registered in the preceding paragraph. In holding that " $p$  is somehow lodged in the mind," Goldman presumably is not requiring that  $p$  itself is in the mind; it is surely sufficient (no more than this would even be intelligible) that  $p$  is *virtually* in the mind, in the form of a "representation." Furthermore (though Goldman does not explicitly say this), if an inner representation of  $p$  is to be at all relevant to the dispositional belief that  $p$ , it must play a role in the exercise of the disposition to believe that  $p$ ; in particular, a disposition to believe rises to the level of a (dispositional) belief only if it operates by "activating" or "accessing" an inner representation.

This is enough to suggest a revised analysis of " $x$  has at  $t$  a dispositional belief that  $p$ ." This analysis comprises two conditions, the first of which is simply our earlier working definition of dispositional belief, now regarded more properly as a generic schema for any disposition to believe. Since this condition sets forth  $x$ 's counterfactual *access* to  $p$ , I shall call it

*The Access Condition.* Were circumstance  $C$  to obtain,  $x$  would occurrently believe at  $t$  that  $p$ .

This schematic formulation leaves  $C$  unspecified (clearly not all circumstances for which the counterfactual is true warrant ascribing to  $x$  a disposition to believe, let alone a dispositional belief, that  $p$ ); but the right specification of  $C$  is a complex question that we can afford to leave open, since the only circumstance appealed to in this paper is  $x$ 's considering at  $t$  whether  $p$ , which is an acceptable substitute for  $C$  if anything is. The second condition—the new element in this revised analysis—is the differentia by which (dispositional) belief is distinguished from other dispositions to believe. This condition is

*The Location Condition.* The mechanism by which the obtaining of  $C$  would lead to  $x$ 's occurrently believing that  $p$  involves  $x$ 's accessing at  $t$  a representation whose content is  $p$  and whose location at  $t$  is internal to  $x$ .

In so labeling this condition, I mean to underscore its function in distinguishing cases where exercising a disposition to believe that  $p$  involves accessing an *internal* representation of  $p$  (e.g., a configuration of long-term memory), which cases support  $x$ 's claim to a (dispositional) belief that  $p$ , from cases where exercising a disposition to believe that  $p$  involves accessing an *external* representation of  $p$  (e.g., a configuration of print on the pages of an encyclopaedia which  $x$  would read were she to wonder whether  $p$ ), which cases do *not* support  $x$ 's claim to a (dispositional) belief that  $p$ .

Given this revised analysis, we can readily verify the present complaint against *DOS*. If God is to hold a (dispositional) belief that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ , it must be the case that

(F3)' God possesses at  $t_1$  a disposition to believe that Jones mows his lawn at  $t_3$ , which disposition is exercisable by God's accessing at  $t_1$  some internal state (an "anticipation-state") which obtains at  $t_1$  and which represents Jones's mowing his lawn at  $t_3$ .

But (F3)' is not satisfied by the God portrayed in *DOS*, and with good reason: if at  $t_1$  there exists an inner representation such that accessing it not only would not (in present



circumstances) but could not (in any circumstances) lead God into error regarding Jones's lawn-mowing, this is just as incompatible with the (libertarian) freedom of Jones's lawn-mowing as is occurrent foreknowledge of Jones's actions. Insofar as *DOS* rests on any mechanism at all, this will consist of His directly accessing the very state of affairs He dispositionally foreknows. This means that

(F3)" God possesses at  $t_1$  a disposition to believe that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ , which disposition is exercisable by God's accessing at  $t_1$  some external state (the state of affairs consisting of Jones's mowing his lawn at  $t_3$ ) that does not obtain until after  $t_1$  and which represents Jones's mowing his lawn at  $t_3$ .<sup>22</sup>

(F3)", however, fails the Location Condition. The most it entitles us to attribute to God is the disposition to believe that Jones will mow his lawn at  $t_3$ , not the (dispositional) belief that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ . Thus *DOS* stands guilty as charged: its scenario for nonoccurrent foreknowledge turns out to involve no foreknowledge at all.

This is an impressive objection, but I think that it ultimately fails. There are two parts to the objection: (1) the recommendation of a new condition for (dispositional) belief, and (2) a demonstration that *DOS* violates this condition. I have doubts about both parts of the objection, though it is only the first that I shall pursue in any detail here.

A serious difficulty for the Location Condition is that there appear to be clear cases of knowledge that fail to satisfy this condition. Suppose that I am not occurrently thinking that today is Monday, but that *were* I to consider what day it is, I *would* form the occurrent belief that it is Monday. This counterfactual might be true because (a) the closest nonactual world in which I consider what day it is, is a world in which I *remember* that it is Monday; yet another way it might be true is if (b) the closest nonactual world in which I consider what day it is, is a world in which I *find out* that it is Monday (e.g., by checking today's newspaper). The Location Condition rightly excludes (b) while including (a) as a case of (dispositionally) believing that today is Monday. So far so good. But there are other

cases as well; indeed, most of the time when I (nonoccurrently) know that it is Monday, I do so in virtue of neither (a) nor (b), but because (c) the closest nonactual world in which I consider what day it is, is a world in which I *figure out* that it is Monday: I think back to what I did earlier (yesterday, this morning), attempt to match what I did with the days on which I would do such things, and arrive at the present by inference. Here there is pre-occurrent knowledge that *today is Monday* without this propositional content being represented in a memory trace or other mental state which satisfies the Location Condition.

Goldman's own response to such examples is to stick with the Location Condition and deny the knowledge-claim;<sup>23</sup> but I expect few will feel comparably devoted to a theory that entails (among other dubious consequences) that we seldom know what day it is. Another response, made by Joseph Margolis, is to stick with the Location Condition, *accept* the knowledge-claim, but deny the corresponding *belief-claim*;<sup>24</sup> but again one must ask whether the Location Condition is worth the cost (in this case, abandoning the principle that knowledge entails belief). A third response, which retains the Location Condition as the ultimate arbiter while accepting both the knowledge- and the belief-claims, is to hold that  $x$  has at  $t$  a dispositional belief that  $p$  only if the Location Condition is satisfied by  $p$  or by some set of propositions from which  $x$  might infer that  $p$ . This response gets around Daniel Dennett's objection that, my dispositional beliefs being "apparently infinite," to require each belief to satisfy the Location Condition "means their storage, however miniaturized, will take up more room than there is in the brain."<sup>25</sup> But this disjunctive version of the Location Condition, while it provides the right answers for (a)-(c), lacks an independent rationale. If internal location is intuitively necessary for belief, what justifies waiving the requirement when it comes to inferrable beliefs like (c)? And if it is waived in such cases, what justifies continued confidence in the original intuition?

The radical alternative is to reject the Location Condition altogether. This line is taken, e.g., by Alan White. Responding to the

objection that it is “because we already have our knowledge stored somewhere, say in our mind or in our memory, that we are able to produce it on demand,” White notes that “not everything that can be produced is some kind of entity which must have existed somewhere before its production. All that we need have is the ability to produce it; and abilities are not located anywhere.” Knowledge, White concludes, is just such an ability: “to know that *p* is to be able to give an answer, namely that *p*, which is in fact the correct answer to a possible question.”<sup>26</sup> Now if this represents nothing more than a retreat to the Access Condition it will of course be unsatisfactory, since that condition tolerates cases like (*b*) which should not count as beliefs. But White’s reference to an “ability” to produce the requisite belief “on demand” suggests a version of the Access Condition considerably less promiscuous than my deliberately open-ended formulation of it. On this version it is not just having access to *p*, but being *in command* of *p*—having access to *p* “at will,” free (within limits) from frustration or delay—which is held to entail belief. Let us call this vague requirement the “*Secure Access Condition*.” The fact that “secure access” is vague and a matter of degree is not a serious problem for present purposes, since “belief” is also vague and plausibly a matter of degree. In any event, the case that most concerns us does not appear to require any fine distinctions of degree or meaning: a dispositionally omniscient being, for whom considering whether *p* would be sufficient for knowing whether *p*, would have maximally secure access to all truths on any construal of “secure access.”

There are at least two respects in which the Secure Access Condition has a marked advantage over the Location Condition. In the first place, the former (unlike the latter) gives the intuitively right answer for all of our test cases: (*a*) and (*c*)—the two cases of (dispositional) belief—exhibit relatively secure access to the relevant information, while (*b*)—the case of nonbelief—makes access to this information *insecure*, inasmuch as it is dependent on the chance that there is a newspaper nearby, that it is *today’s* newspaper,

that the copy editor caught any misprints in its date, that a power outage has not dimmed the lights by which to read it, and so on. In the second place, even in those cases where the Secure Access Condition and the Location Condition give the same answer, the latter appears parasitic on the former. The Location Condition requires (i) an inner (ii) representation of *p*. Regarding (i), a special problem arises when applying the Location Condition to cases of nonoccurrent as well as occurrent belief. For what makes it the case that an unconscious state can be said to be lodged in the mind? Presumably nothing but the fact that the activation of this state plays a key role in the exercise of the disposition to believe that *p*. A representation satisfies the Location Condition, then, not in virtue of its meeting some independent criterion for “internalness,” but in virtue of its contribution to *p*’s accessibility. So it is the Access Condition (Secure or otherwise) which is fundamental. Regarding (ii), what makes an inner state a representation of *p* (and not of *q*)? A representational state does not possess its meaning inherently and in isolation, but in virtue of its functional relations with other states. Even if we suppose a mental language in which representations are encoded, what confers upon a particular configuration of “mentalese” the meaning *p* is presumably the way this configuration functions in producing an occurrent belief that *p*. This makes the Access Condition again fundamental.

There is no doubt that the Location Condition exercises a certain intuitive pull. But this may simply reflect the fact that having *p* lodged in the mind, as in (*a*), is one way to secure access to *p*. Even if the human condition is such that there is a strong correlation between internal location and the degree of access required by belief, the correlation is not a necessary one, as (*c*) demonstrates; nor is there reason to regard it as other than a human peculiarity. To advert to Plato’s aviary metaphor, if the point of encaging birds after their initial capture is to make it easier to lay hands on them in the future, then much also depends on the nature of the birds, and of the fowler. A tame parrot or falcon perched outside in a tree may be more accessible than a

starling or hummingbird darting about inside the cage. As for a maximally great fowler, who has only to will the possession of any given bird for his intention to be realized, the fact that some bird is or is not ensconced in the aviary would be utterly irrelevant.

It is not, however, necessary to secure the Secure Access Condition in order to defend *DOS* from the present objection. It is enough that the Location Condition, on which that objection is based, be discredited; and this has already been done. Nevertheless, discredited theories often return in new guises. It is therefore worth noting that even if the Location Condition were somehow rehabilitated, the objection would still not go through, since its second prong—the claim that *DOS* fails the Location Condition—is just as dubious as its first. I shall content myself here with simply indicating the general direction from which such doubt might arise, reserving for another occasion the development of a positive and detailed account of how *DOS* could satisfy the Location Condition.

Determining location with respect to the mind is a vexed matter to begin with, quite apart from *DOS*, since our concept of the mind's spatial boundaries is even fuzzier than our concept of its temporal boundaries. Consider a prosthetic memory-device, programmed with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which can be strapped to one's head. Does such a device provide one with (dispositional) belief in the contents of the encyclopaedia, or merely with a disposition to believe in those contents? Would the answer be any different if the encyclopaedia were instead stored in a black box, and the prosthesis were only a transmitter-receiver wired to the short-term memory center of the brain and connected to the box by radio waves? If we take the Location Condition as our guide, such questions are to be answered by determining whether the device's memory-states are "internally located." But it's not clear how this criterion is to be applied in such cases. Vagueness of this sort does not make the distinction itself suspect, or undercut its importance in those areas where it is appealed to. "Knowledge" and "belief" are also vague, and a faithful analysis should be no sharper than its analysis-

dum. The problem lies not with the *truth* of the Location Condition (that was the problem with the first part of the objection), but with its *application*. Borderline cases should be expected, and these will be hard to adjudicate, as the prosthetic memory example shows. It should come as no surprise that this problem is particularly acute when the mind belongs to God. Two attributes of God are chiefly responsible for this situation. One is divine *omnipresence*. On a straightforward reading of this attribute, nothing is external to God; so any state that functions for God as a representation (as the state of affairs consisting of Jones's mowing his lawn at  $t_3$  is said in (F3)" to play this role with respect to God's disposition to believe that Jones will mow at  $t_3$ ) would appear to constitute an internal representation. The other attribute is the traditional conception of God as a *non-spatial spirit*. On a straightforward reading of *this* attribute, God lacks spatial location altogether; so it is hard to see how the internal-external distinction is to be applied to Him at all. Between them, these two attributes render the crucial distinction between internal and external even fuzzier than it normally is, making it prohibitively difficult for the critic to demonstrate that *DOS* involves a complete and decisive failure of internalness.<sup>27</sup>

The objection canvassed in this section is that (dispositional) belief requires, prior to its exercise, the existence of something internal to the believer that determines the content of the belief; but that the God of *DOS* fails to satisfy this requirement. In response, I have argued that belief is *not* bound by this requirement, and that there is prima facie cause to doubt whether divine foreknowledge fails the requirement in any case. Given the two-fold collapse of this final objection, I conclude that *DOS* provides a model of divine foreknowledge that is consistent with the premises of the theological fatalist's argument but which is free from fatalistic implications.

#### IV

The problem of divine foreknowledge vs. human freedom derives from a libertarian conception of freedom under which

(a) Free agency requires alternative possibilities, combined with a demonstration that

(b) Infallible foreknowledge precludes alternative possibilities.

But the fact that belief comes in two forms, occurrent and dispositional, reveals a serious lacuna in the argument for (b) as it is traditionally formulated. Two indispensable premises of the argument require that “belief” be read in different ways: (A1), the premise that knowledge entails belief, requires an *inclusive* reading which is indifferent to whether belief is occurrent or dispositional, while (A2), the premise that past beliefs are hard facts about the past, requires a narrowly *occurrent* reading. Since it commits the fallacy of equivocation, the argument for (b) is therefore invalid.

If (b) rests on an equivocation, does it follow that *theological fatalism* rests on an equivocation? That depends on what the problem of theological fatalism is taken to be. It seems to me that there is more than one problem here. The fact that “Bachelors are unmarried men” is analytically true does not generate a *problem of unmarried bachelors* because we have no inclination to believe anything that conflicts with this. But there are at least two theses with which the conjunction of (a) and (b) is inconsistent. One is that

(c) There exist instances of free agency, and there also exists an everlasting being essentially endowed with omnipresence.

If (a) and (b) are both true, then (c) must be false. Since (a) and (b) thereby threaten the existence of entities central to theism, let us call this challenge to (c) the “theological” problem of theological fatalism. Now consider

(d) Knowledge alone cannot jeopardize free agency.

While anyone committed to (c) will doubtless endorse (d) as well, the latter may be intuitively attractive in its own right. After all, how *could* antecedent knowledge render un-free what would otherwise have been free? But if (a) and (b) are true, then a certain kind of knowledge *does* jeopardize free agency. Since (d) does not involve any theological

commitments, let us call the direct threat which (a) and (b) pose to (d), apart from their implications for (c), the “metaphysical” problem of theological fatalism. While Pike presented his original argument as showing the theologian “that there is a way of thinking about God’s knowledge which would . . . commit him to determinism,” he also noted that “this claim seems intuitively false” and “has a sharp counterintuitive ring,”<sup>28</sup> suggesting that he recognized an additional problem that is independent of one’s commitment to a particular conception of God.

Now insofar as the theological and metaphysical problems of theological fatalism are generated by the conjunction of (a) and (b), those problems are vitiated by my critique of (b). But suppose that the argument for (b) is disequivocated, leading to its replacement by

(b’) Infallible *occurrent* foreknowledge precludes alternative possibilities.

David Widerker seems in effect to do this in a recent article in which he responds to Alston’s account of divine knowledge by making the argument for theological fatalism rest on the impossibility of God *revealing* His knowledge to anyone, a revelation that would appear to require that He first reveal it to Himself: that is, that it become occurrent and not merely dispositional.<sup>29</sup> This of course involves an important revision in the terms of the argument. Does the problem of theological fatalism survive this revision, or does it disappear with the substitution of (b’) for (b)?

If the theological problem does not completely disappear, it is at least substantially mitigated. That is because (a) and (b’) are not incompatible with (c). What they are incompatible with is

(c’) There exist instances of free agency, and there also exists an everlasting being essentially endowed with *occurrent* omnipresence.

But then the conjunction of (a) and (b’) challenges only one particular concept of foreknowledge, leaving the theist free to seek alternative conceptions which are consistent with her basic commitment to divine omniscience. Whether this quest would be ultimately successful is a

question I cannot go into in this paper; but its prospects are not nearly so bleak as they are under the discredited (b).<sup>30</sup>

The situation is quite different when it comes to the metaphysical problem, since (a) and (b)' are still incompatible with (d). For those whose intuitions make (d) compelling, the conjunction of (a) and (b)' will be just as troubling as the conjunction of (a) and (b). So this version of the problem does *not* rest

on an equivocation. The revised argument for (b)' challenges the libertarian to reject either (a) or (d); yet both (a) and (d) may strike the libertarian (and many nonlibertarians) as strongly intuitive. This "antinomy" of libertarian freedom, which survives the move from (b) to (b)', seems to me to be the most profound of the various problems bequeathed by Pike's fascinating argument.<sup>31</sup>

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### NOTES

1. Strictly speaking, theological fatalism is the position that, *because* an everlasting and essentially omnipresent being exists and *because* the existence of such a being is incompatible with (libertarian) freedom, *no one is (libertarianly) free*. But in this paper I use the term more broadly as a label of convenience for any defense of the incompatibility claim, whether the defense is undertaken as part of a theological refutation of libertarianism (John Calvin), an attack on divine foreknowledge (William Hasker), or simply a demonstration of the failure of certain arguments that have been brought against the incompatibility claim (John Fischer—see his "Soft Facts and Harsh Realities: Reply to William Craig," *Religious Studies*, vol. 27 (1991), p. 525, for a clarification of his position).
2. The locus classicus for the contemporary stage of the debate over theological fatalism is Nelson Pike's "Divine Foreknowledge and Voluntary Action," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 74 (1965), pp. 27-46. It is in this article that Jones and his lawn-mowing are introduced.
3. The relevance of this distinction for fatalistic arguments is noted in John Turk Saunders' "Of God and Freedom," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 75 (1966), pp. 219-25, while the terms "hard fact" and "soft fact" are coined in Nelson Pike's "Of God and Freedom: A Rejoinder," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 75 (1966), pp. 369-79. The subsequent effort to formulate a rigorous definition of these two classes of facts about the past has proved notoriously difficult to bring off (e.g., the intuitive notion of *fixity*, by which I have introduced the distinction, is itself in need of definition and thus has little to contribute toward a precise understanding of "soft" vs. "hard" facts). For this reason I try to avoid in the present essay any claims that rely on too fine an understanding of the distinction.
4. See, e.g., Alfred J. Freddoso, "Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 80 (1983), p. 268: "But the past hopes, fears, beliefs, desires, predictions, etc., of historical agents are clearly unalterable elements of our past and must be counted as part of our history by any explanation of what it is for two worlds to share the same history at a given time."
5. William P. Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs?" *Religious Studies*, vol. 22 (1986), pp. 287-306.
6. E.g., Marilyn McCord Adams, "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?" *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 76 (1967), pp. 492-503. On Adams' version of the strategy, what is "soft" about divine forebeliefs is the fact that these beliefs are *divine*, while for most other contemporary "Ockhamists" what is soft is the fact that God held *those beliefs* (rather than others).
7. Alvin I. Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 15.
8. D. M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 7.
9. Plato, *Theaetetus* 196d-199c.
10. Aristotle, *De Anima* 417a27-28.

11. John Pollock, *Knowledge and Justification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 63-64. See also the following, all by Alvin Goldman: *A Theory of Human Action* (Princeton: University Press, 1970), pp. 86-87; "Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief," *The Monist*, vol. 61 (1978), pp. 526-27; and *Epistemology and Cognition*, pp. 200-201.
12. Pollock, in the quoted passage, is careful to assert only that the counterfactual analysis provides "part" of what it means to have a dispositional belief. What more is there? The obvious candidate is a noncounterfactual core to the disposition. This candidate's credentials are scrutinized in §III of the paper.
13. See my "Dispositional Omniscience," *Philosophical Studies*, (forthcoming).
14. Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1986), pp. 111-14.
15. John Martin Fischer, "Freedom and Foreknowledge," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 92 (1983), p. 75. Saunders' original example was presented in his "Of God and Freedom."
16. *Ibid.*, p. 76. I have changed Fischer's temporal indexing to correspond with my own.
17. See, e.g., William Hasker's "The Hardness of the Past: A Reply to Reichenbach," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 4 (1987), p. 338: "We can all readily understand that the *very same event* of Luther's birth, *without any change in its intrinsic characteristics*, can count either as Luther's-being-born-502-years-before-Reichenbach-writes or as Luther's-being-born-502-years-before-Reichenbach-does-not-write, depending on what happens 502 years later. But can we at all understand that the *very same event of God's believing* can, without change in any of *its* intrinsic characteristics, count *either* as God's-believing-that-Clarence-will-eat-an-omelet *or* as God's-believing-that-Clarence-will-not-eat-an-omelet? If we cannot, then the project of classifying God's beliefs as soft facts is in deep trouble."
18. "A Latter-Day Look at the Foreknowledge Problem," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 33 (1993), pp. 135-36.
19. John Martin Fischer, "Hard-Type Soft Facts," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 95 (1986), pp. 591-601.
20. For the difference between dispositional beliefs and dispositions to believe, and the irreducibility of the former to the latter, see Robert Audi, "Believing and Affirming," *Mind*, vol. 91 (1982), pp. 115-20.
21. Alvin I. Goldman, "Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief," p. 526.
22. This assumes that a thing can represent itself, an assumption which usefully highlights the parallel with (F3)'.  
23. Alvin I. Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition*, p. 202.
24. Joseph Margolis, "Knowledge, Belief, and Thought," *Ratio*, vol. 14 (1972), pp. 74-82.
25. Daniel C. Dennett, "Brain Writing and Mind Reading," in *Brainstorms* (Montgomery, VT: Bradford Books, 1978), p. 45.
26. Alan R. White, *The Nature of Knowledge*, APQ Library of Philosophy, ed. Nicholas Rescher (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), pp. 116, 119-20.
27. This appeal to unique features of the divine situation is not an example of the special pleading I have attributed to other critics of theological fatalism and been at pains to avoid in my own account. After all, it is not special pleading to judge different cases differently, so long as the same criteria are applied all around. If my argument in this section is successful, however, the concept of "belief" at work in *DOS* is no different from the concept as it is ordinarily used in thinking about human belief.
28. Nelson Pike, "Divine Foreknowledge and Voluntary Action," p. 27.
29. David Widerker, "Troubles with Ockhamism," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 87 (1990). The argument in question may be found on pp. 473-78.
30. In fact, they're pretty good—or so I argue in "Dispositional Omniscience."
31. I am grateful to John Fischer and Nelson Pike for their comments on an early version of this paper. I also wish to thank Al Plantinga, Tom Flint, and the other members of the Philosophy of Religion Study Group at Notre Dame, who subjected the paper to intense scrutiny over a two-month period while I held a Fellowship at the Center for Philosophy of Religion. Finally, Charles Hughes was the commentator when a short version of the paper was read at the Pacific Division Meeting of the APA in 1994.