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Fatalism for Presentists

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The increased attention philosophers have paid to the problem of divine foreknowledge *v.* human freedom during the last fifty years is almost entirely due to Nelson Pike's "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action" [17]. Interestingly, Arthur Prior's "The Formalities of Omniscience" [18], published just three years earlier, is not even mentioned by Pike, and figures hardly at all in the extensive debate stirred up by Pike's essay. At least this was true until quite recently. In a remarkable reversal of fortune, Prior's concerns about the argument for "theological fatalism," once largely ignored, have now moved to the center of the debate, and his relevance is at last being recognized.¹

Here's one reasonably perspicuous way of laying out the argument for theological fatalism as it has developed over the course of the debate inspired by Pike's paper. (The perspicuity of this formulation rests on its having a distinct premise corresponding to each of the main points at which the argument has been challenged.) The argument is designed to show that certain assumptions about God are incompatible with free agency. There are three such assumptions, which collectively constitute what I'll call the "God Assumption":

- (i) God is omniscient (if p , then God knows that p)
- (ii) God is essentially inerrant, i.e., infallible (necessarily, if God believes that p , then p)
- (iii) God exists "eternally" (there is no time such that the proposition *God exists*, if asserted at that time, would be false)

The argument proceeds as follows. Suppose someone X performs an action A at a time T_3 . Let T_2 be a time prior to X 's birth and T_1 any time prior to T_2 . Then

- (1) It is true at T_1 that X will do A at T_3 . (The Omnitemporality of Truth)
- (2) God knows at T_1 that X will do A at T_3 . (God Assumption (i) and (iii))
- (3) God believes at T_1 that X will do A at T_3 . (Analysis of Knowledge: X knows that p entails X believes that p)
- (4) It is accidentally necessary at T_2 that God believed at T_1 that X will do A at T_3 . (Necessity of the Past)

(5) It is accidentally necessary at T2 that X will do A at T3. (God Assumption (ii), Transfer of Necessity Principle)

(6) X cannot refrain from doing A at T3. (Incompatibilist Analysis of “Can”)

(7) X does not do A at T3 *freely*. (Principle of Alternate Possibilities)

The same argument can be given for any agent, action, and time. So no one ever does anything freely, if the God Assumption is granted.²

Before turning to the steps Prior rejects, I should comment briefly on some of the other steps in the argument. Step (3) looks like a step backward. But the reason the strongest versions of the argument proceed via (3) rather than the stronger (2) is that (3), given divine infallibility, is *strong enough*, and it’s a stronger candidate than (2) for use at step (4). Knowledge entails truth, so the fact set forth in (2) is in part *constituted by* the fact that X will A at T3, and that makes it a “soft fact” relative to T2, to use the terminology employed in contemporary “Ockhamist” critiques of the argument—or, in the terms Prior himself favors, it expresses a “contingent future-infected past” [18:49]. Assuming that (3) fares better on this score, it looks like (4) and (5) are irresistible, for reasons that Prior articulates as follows: God’s precognition of the agent’s future action would then be “necessary, if only because it’s *past*, and so beyond anyone’s power to prevent,” in which case “anything that follows from this necessary, i.e. now-unpreventable, truth, must itself be now-unpreventable” [18:45]. Step (6), of course, would be denied by compatibilists, and step (7) by philosophers persuaded by Frankfurt-type counterexamples to the Principle of Alternate Possibilities.³ But Prior, who takes (5) to establish the argument’s no-freedom conclusion, does not get into intramural debates between compatibilists and incompatibilists. His contribution to the argument lies elsewhere.

Where does Prior believe that the argument goes wrong? It is clear in “The Formalities of Omniscience” that he rejects step (2) of the argument, because he rejects

(8) For all *p*, if (it is the case that) *p*, God has always known that it would be the case that *p*. [18:43]

There are at least two general grounds on which Prior disputes (8). The first belongs to reasons for rejecting (8), and so for rejecting (2), even if one accepts

(9) For all *p*, if (it is the case that) *p* then it has always been the case that it would be the case that *p*. [18:44]

For the sake of contrast, I’ll mention two such reasons that Prior does *not* endorse.

The classic challenge to (2) comes from a Boethian conception of God on which God has not “always known” future events because, being atemporally eternal, he has not *always existed*. But this challenge has fallen out of favor among theistic philosophers, and it’s one with which Prior is unsympathetic. Responding to Aquinas’s “Boethian” view “that God’s knowledge is in some way right outside of time,” Prior says: “I want to argue against this view, on the ground

that its final effect is to restrict *what God knows* to those truths, if any, which are themselves timeless” [18:42], adding (for considerable rhetorical effect!), “it seems an extraordinary way of affirming God’s omniscience if a person, when asked what God knows *now*, must say ‘Nothing’, and when asked what He knew yesterday, must again say ‘Nothing’, and must yet again say ‘Nothing’ when asked what God will know tomorrow” [18:42-43].

Another challenge to (2), also grounded in a rejection of (8) but not resting on a Boethian denial that God exists in time, comes from philosophers like William Hasker [7], Richard Swinburne [27] and Peter van Inwagen [28]. They accept (9) but deny (8) on the grounds that (a) there *are* future contingent truths, (b) God’s infallibly foreknowing them would render them *noncontingent*, contradicting (a) (for there would then be *no* future contingent truths), so (c) it is impossible for God to know the contingent future. But this result is perfectly compatible with classical theism, Hasker *et al.* argue, since God’s failure to know these truths no more compromises his Anselmian perfection than his failure to perform any other logically impossible task. Insofar as this response frankly affirms the existence of future contingent truths, it’s obviously unavailable to Prior.

Prior’s reason for rejecting (8)—putting (9) to one side for the moment—is more direct than the two challenges just mentioned. If X’s doing A at T3 is, at T1, still contingent, then (he writes): “I cannot see in what way the alleged knowledge, even if it were God’s, could be more than correct guessing. For there would be *ex hypothesi* nothing that could *make* it knowledge, no present *ground* for the guess’s correctness which a specially penetrating person might perceive” [18:49]. This concern about (2) has attracted increasing attention in the literature. I’ll mention just two examples. Ryan Byerly [1] has made it the focus of an entire book, arguing that God’s *ordering of times* in primitive earlier-than relations can account for his infallible foreknowledge while leaving human freedom intact. Yet more recently, John Martin Fischer [5] has developed an account of God’s foreknowledge on which he “bootstraps” to certainty by combining an (otherwise fallible) knowledge of the contingent future with self-knowledge of his own infallibility. It seems to me that neither of these efforts succeeds and that Prior’s worry about how foreknowledge of a contingent future is even possible has not been satisfied, but I don’t propose to pursue the matter here.⁴ Suffice it to say that this recent flurry of activity suggests that Prior’s doubts about how even *God* could have knowledge of future contingents is beginning to be recognized as a serious problem.

But Prior also, and more importantly, rejects (2) because (unlike Hasker *et al.*) he denies (9), and so rejects step (1). The assumption that there are future contingent truths is the opening wedge in arguments for fatalism (theological and nontheological), and denying this assumption allows one to nip the arguments in the bud. One can distinguish, somewhat artificially but nevertheless usefully, between objections to future contingent truths that locate the problem primarily in their *futurity* and those that locate the problem primarily in their *contingency*. The latter are typically developed via a Peircean semantics that assigns maximal causal force to the predictive use of the word ‘will’. To say that something *will* happen, given a Peircean tense logic, is to assign it a probability of 1.0, and that’s incompatible with its being contingent; so there are no future contingent truths. This is the principal ground on which (1) has been challenged, and it’s the principal concern that Prior develops in “The Formalities of Omniscience.” But this territory has been well explored in the literature. (In addition to the vast

literature on future contingent truth, see Rhoda, Boyd and Belt [23] for an application of Peircean semantics to the problem of theological fatalism. For a response to Rhoda *et al.*, see Craig and Hunt [2].) For this reason I would like to turn instead in another direction.⁵

Prior's interest in logic and semantics was very much in the service of metaphysical issues: "Philosophy, including Logic," he wrote, "is not primarily about language, but about the real world" [20:45]. Regarding the real world, Prior endorsed presentism: "the present simply *is* the real considered in relation to two species of unreality, namely the past and the future" [19:245]. For Prior, then, the futurity of future contingent truths was itself a ground of reproach against them. Not all presentists deny future-contingent truth, and there are grounds for denial other than presentism. But it's presentist resources for avoiding fatalism that I wish to explore in what follows.

I should first say something about why fatalism is a *problem*. *Logical* or *future-truth* fatalism—the kind that worried Aristotle and the Stoics—*isn't* much of a problem. The simplest versions turn on a modal fallacy—mistaking the necessity of the *consequence* for the necessity of the *consequent*, to use Aquinas's terminology—while versions designed to avoid this defect violate what Trenton Merricks calls the "truism about truth" that truth depends on the world.⁶ *Theological* fatalism (*pace* Merricks) is much more formidable, but would seem to pose a problem only for theists, and even then only for some theists (classical rather than open theists, for example, and perhaps not even all classical theists, if the Boethian conception of God as existing in timeless eternity provides an escape from the argument). So the question whether presentism allows one to avoid fatalism may seem to be of limited interest: unless one is committed to the existence of an infallibly omniscient sempiternal being, the fact that presentism might put one in a position to avoid fatalism is a solution looking for a problem.

Why should the relative success of the argument for theological fatalism concern anyone who isn't committed to the full God Assumption (or the assumption of human freedom, for that matter)? The reason is that theological fatalism is arguably not just a theological problem but an *aporetic* problem. An example of an aporetic problem is Zeno's Achilles paradox. The relevant facts about this famous problem are these: (1) An argument is given, starring a tortoise, renowned for its slowness, and Achilles, Homer's "fleetest of the Achaeans." (2) The argument's conclusion is that Achilles can't pass the tortoise. (3) It's surprisingly hard to say exactly where the argument goes wrong. (The details of the argument don't matter, so long as it's hard to say where it goes wrong.) Nevertheless, we're within our epistemic rights in believing that there's something wrong with the argument, even if we don't know, and perhaps have no idea, *what* is wrong with it. Moreover, the problem posed by the argument cannot be solved by revising one's conception of the argument's *dramatis personae*. Achillean revisionism ("perhaps Achilles was a quadriplegic and this 'fleetest of the Achaeans' stuff was Homer's little joke") simply removes Achilles from complicity in the problem; the same goes for testudine revisionism ("maybe this was a super-tortoise!"). The problem is easily reinstated by substituting Hermes (or Usain Bolt) for Achilles, or a snail or glacier for the tortoise. Zeno's argument constitutes a thought-experiment, and its terms can be *stipulated*. In sum, the argument presents a *puzzle*, not a serious brief against the possibility of motion. Understood aporetically, the solution to the problem involves discovering how best to rethink our assumptions or sharpen our conceptual tools so we don't fall prey to the argument.

Consider now the problem of theological fatalism. Here are three facts about this problem that parallel the three salient facts about Zeno's Achilles paradox: (1) An argument is given, starring God, an eternally existent and infallibly omniscient being, and X, an agent who performs a presumptively free action A at time T3. (2) The argument's conclusion is that X doesn't perform A at T3 freely. (3) It isn't easy to see where the argument might go wrong. But why think that this problem, like the Achilles paradox, can be construed aporetically? I cannot defend this judgment fully here, but I can support it with an intuition pump. Suppose that X's A-ing at T3 satisfies to the highest degree *your* favorite criteria for free agency, whatever they may be. These criteria might include the following, among others: that X does A willingly; that doing A doesn't flout any of X's second-order desires; that X can abstain from A-ing at T3 should he choose to do so; that X doesn't A at T3 under coercion or duress; that X's A-ing at T3 is not causally determined by events prior to the X's birth; that X does not A at T3 in ignorance of relevant circumstances; and so on. Now add one more condition: before X was even born, God infallibly believed that X would A at T3. How could *that* additional condition have as a consequence that X's A-ing at T3 isn't an instance of free agency? There are conditions that clearly *would* warrant such a reassessment—for example, if it were added that X was under the influence of drugs or post-hypnotic suggestion, or controlled by Martians via a chip implanted in his brain. But the idea that the mere presence of an infallible foreknower could make this kind of difference is deeply puzzling. We have good reason to suspect that the argument goes wrong, even if we're unable to determine exactly *where* it goes wrong. Note that our puzzlement has nothing essentially to do with whether the God Assumption is theologically correct. Suppose God doesn't exist, or doesn't know future-contingent truths, or knows them (truths which are future-contingent relative to *us*) *timelessly*. That would remove God from complicity in the problem, just as Achilles could be similarly removed from complicity in Zeno's paradox, but a puzzle would remain. With God out of the picture, we're left with a pure thought-experiment, whose terms can be stipulated. So imagine an infallibly omniprescient being named 'Gob'. It seems that a paradigmatically free action shouldn't lose this status just because Gob exists; yet here's an argument showing otherwise. While it is perhaps possible that the argument gets things right in the end, it isn't unreasonable to approach the argument with the suspicion that it harbors an impropriety somewhere, and treat it aporetically.⁷

That's enough about why I think the argument for theological fatalism should be of interest to all philosophers, theists and nontheists alike. Let's turn now to presentist resources for resisting the argument's fatalistic conclusion. If there are no future-contingent truths, then step (1) of the argument is false, and neither God nor Gob will hold the beliefs that fuel the argument.⁸ But if presentism is true, truths about the future must supervene on the present, and there does not appear to be anything in the present on which future-*contingent* truths *could* supervene.

Presentists who take this line (and not all do) must make sure that it doesn't equally jeopardize truths about the past. Take the proposition *Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C.* The growing block has a truth-maker in 44 B.C. for this proposition, but presentism does not; it needs a present truth-maker. This is already a cost of presentism, in my view, since the content of the proposition has to do only with what happened in 44 B.C.; nothing at all is being said about present conditions from which, e.g., Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C. can be inferred. (I'm

tempted to say that *evidence*-makers are being confused here with *truth*-makers.) But a presentist may well question the assumption that the truth-conditions for a proposition must track what it's "about." An assertion about Santa Claus is made true by something else (not Santa, but a story); likewise an assertion about the past can be made true by something else (not the past, but the present).⁹ Let's suppose that's right. Still, the intrinsic properties of the present seem compatible with multiple pasts. Suppose God tamped out all causal traces of Caesar's assassination; it shouldn't result from this that the proposition *Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C.* is no longer true. So it's not clear how all the truths about the past that a good theory needs to accommodate could be grounded in the present, at least if the grounding is supposed to be *causally* connected to the truths that it grounds. For presentists who wish to deny future-contingent truth, it's natural to look to present causal traces to ground truths about the past because the unidirectionality of the causal arrow ensures that there won't be equivalent causal "anticipations" of the contingent future. But causal traces won't do the job; the presentist will have to look elsewhere.

Here's a quick review of four recent (and probably familiar) proposals for how this problem might be avoided under presentism. Tom Crisp [3] posits an ersatz B-series of times and suggests that the present time is such that Caesar's being assassinated in 44 B.C. is "temporally accessible" to it, the model here being the way that the actual world is such that certain other worlds or possible states of affairs are "logically accessible" to it. This is a fact about the present, and so, on presentism, a fact about reality. But this fact would have to be different if Caesar was not assassinated in 44 B.C. The proposition about Caesar, then, does supervene on reality in a way that is consistent with presentism. That's because such supervenience requires there to be no difference in truth without a difference in reality, and that requirement is satisfied by present facts about temporal accessibility.

Michael Rea [21] looks for a model to the grounding problem for modal truths. If true modal propositions are grounded in irreducible modal properties, then truths about the past might be grounded in irreducibly tensed properties. But how can that be, if the past or future object is not present and so not real? Here again a parallel modal problem might help. We want to say that there are worlds in which Donald Trump does not exist; but if Trump does not exist in those worlds, there is nothing real in those worlds to ground our modal claims about him. The trick is to suppose that we're really talking about Trump's individual essence. It's the same thing when we refer to Julius Caesar now, when he no longer exists: we're really talking about his individual essence, and that essence now has the tensed property *was assassinated in 44 B.C.*¹⁰

Dean Zimmerman [29] notes how a defender of brute powers, dispositions, or liabilities can appeal to "brute facts" to ground her claims. The opponent will doubtless object to such a move, but "[u]nless the opponent can say a good deal more, specifically, about why it is wrong to take dispositions as primitive or brute features of things, the truthmaker objection amounts to little more than dissatisfied grumbling" [29:217]. Zimmerman then suggests that a presentist can make a similar response to the demand for present facts to ground truths about the past: "There are 'backward-looking' properties that objects *really have*, properties like *having been occupied by a dinosaur 150,000,000 years ago*; and there are real facts about which objects have these properties, facts that make propositions about the past true." Zimmerman adds: "The opponents

of presentism have attempted to answer this challenge; but, by my lights, they are still in the dissatisfied grumbling stage” [29:218].

Finally, Dean Zimmerman [30] and Alan Rhoda [22] have suggested independently that, if an omniscient deity exists, then God’s present beliefs about the past can ground truths about the past. If God now believes that Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C., this present fact entails that Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. Zimmerman refers to this as “a literal *deus ex machina*,” ready at hand to resolve presentists’ difficulties with grounding.

It seems to me that all four of these proposals get the explanatory order wrong. Crisp’s temporal accessibility, like logical accessibility, should itself be a supervenient property: no difference in accessibility relations without a difference in other properties. I have a similar concern about Rea’s proposal: even irreducibly modal properties should supervene on nonmodal properties; there can’t be two worlds which differ *only* in their modal properties. *Places* are presently endowed with Zimmerman’s backward-looking properties only *because* those places *were* once endowed with the corresponding present-tense properties. As for the Zimmerman-Rhoda suggestion that truths about the past can be grounded in God’s present beliefs, God surely believes that Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. *because* Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C.; but if the truth of the latter is grounded in the former, we have a pernicious circle of explanatory dependence.

This is no more than a gesture in the direction of an objection. Rather than pressing it against such formidable opponents, which would in any case add little to what others have already said (e.g., Sanson and Caplan [25]), I want to ask instead how any of this helps the presentist to reject step (1) of the argument for theological fatalism. Let’s take up this question with regard to Zimmerman’s proposal that truths about the past, including those that are causally underdetermined by the present, supervene on brute backward-looking properties, like *having been occupied by a dinosaur 150 million years ago*, that presently existing things really have. And let’s suppose that an adequate response is available to the objection that these backward-looking properties are surely explanatorily dependent on something which, according to presentism, isn’t real and thus is unavailable for explanation: *the way things were*. Now consider the parallel proposal that truths about the future, including truths about the causally contingent future, supervene on brute forward-looking properties, like *going to be occupied by an agent X performing an action A at a time T3*, that presently existing things really have. One wants to object that these forward-looking properties are surely explanatorily dependent on something which, according to presentism, isn’t real and thus is unavailable for explanation: *the way things will be*. But it isn’t easy to see how this objection could be available to a presentist attracted to Zimmerman’s line.

Such a presentist will need to explain why present objects can have backward-looking properties but not the corresponding forward-looking properties. How would such an explanation go? Try the following:

The past was once present, and when it was, the present-tense proposition *There are dinosaurs* was unproblematically true. Its truth supervened on the world, in particular, on the properties some region of the world had at that time. Having exemplified the property

being occupied by a dinosaur 150 million years ago, that region then came to exemplify the property *having been occupied by a dinosaur* at a later time, when the dinosaur had left, and this property is one that that region still has today. In sum, the past, to which backward-looking properties point, was once present and real; not so for the future. That is why there are present backward-looking properties but no present forward-looking properties.

But this reply won't do the job. A parallel justification can be offered for future-contingent truths, indicating that the proffered explanation simply presupposes that there are truths about the past but not truths about the future. Here's the parallel explanation:

The future will one day be present, and when it is, the present-tense proposition *XA's at T3* will be unproblematically true. Its truth will supervene on the world, in particular, on the properties some region of the world will have at that time. Since it is going to exemplify the property *being occupied by an agent X performing an action A* at T3, that region then exemplified the property *going to be occupied by an agent X performing an action A* at earlier times, before X began A-ing, and this property is one that that region already has today. In sum, the future, to which forward-looking properties point, will one day be present and real, and that is why there are present forward-looking properties.

I'm not asking whether this is an adequate presentism-friendly justification of future-contingent truth *full stop*; I'm asking whether it is an adequate justification *on the assumption that the presentism-friendly justification of truths about the past that immediately preceded it is adequate*. I might hazard that any presentist who swallows the first justification but balks at the second is just engaged in dissatisfied grumbling!

A similar response can be made to the other three proposals we reviewed. A defender of future-contingent truth might follow Crisp's lead by claiming that X's A-ing at T3 is "temporally accessible" to T1 and maintaining that this fact grounds the future-contingent truth *X will A at T3* when T1 is present. If the temporal accessibility of a past time to the present time is just a brute fact about the present, then it's hard to see why the temporal accessibility of a future time to the present time couldn't also be a brute fact about the present. Rea, who is not a presentist, allows that the irreducibly tensed properties grounding truths about the past could also ground truths about the future. Reference to X at T1, when X does not yet exist, should be construed as talk about X's individual essence, which at T1 has the tensed property *will A at T3*, a property which grounds at T1 the future-contingent truth *X will A at T3*. Finally, Zimmerman's and Rhoda's appeals to God's omniscience with respect to the past would seem to be of equal use to a defender of God's knowledge of the future. Open theists like Zimmerman and Rhoda hold that God can be omniscient despite his ignorance of the contingent future because, given presentism, *there are no truths there to be known*; but it's not clear how they can maintain this position against an advocate of future-contingent truth who contends that such truths are grounded in God's present foreknowledge, since that is exactly how they defend their own commitment to truths about the past in the face of the objection that, given presentism, *there are no truths there to be known*.

In sum, either presentism cannot accommodate truths about the past, in which case it must surely be rejected, or it *can* accommodate them, in which case it has no principled grounds

for denying truths about the contingent future. So that's the first reason why I think that presentists cannot escape the argument for theological fatalism at step (1). But suppose I'm wrong about this. Presentist opponents of future-contingent truth are a wily bunch, and it's impossible to anticipate all the stratagems they might employ for countenancing truths about the past but not about the contingent future. Unfortunately for them, the argument for theological fatalism might not require the literal truth of (1).

Here's why. Suppose that there is nothing in the present on which the propositions about the past and future endorsed by commonsense can supervene. Then, on presentism, those propositions are literally untrue. Commonsense might nevertheless be accommodated if such propositions are "close enough" to the literal truth, differing from literal truth only on technical or theoretical grounds: close enough that it's understandable how commonsense might confuse them for literal truth, and close enough that the interests of commonsense are satisfied despite their literal untruth. Ted Sider [26] has coined the term 'quasi-truths' for such propositions endorsed by commonsense. Sider's "working idea of a quasi-true sentence is one that, *philosophical niceties aside*, is true" [26:332], and Ned Markosian offers this definition: "S is quasi-true =df. S is not literally true, but only in virtue of certain nonempirical or philosophical facts" [15:69]. These are just the sorts of facts that presentism brings to the table. So if presentism does undermine the literal truth of (1), it does so in such a way that (1) remains *quasi-true*.¹¹

This doesn't give us (1), but it appears to give us something close enough to (1) that the argument for theological fatalism is back in business. Arguably, an omniscient being must also know all quasi-truths. That's because, for any quasi-truth, it is true, and not just quasi-true, that it is a quasi-truth. God therefore knows that it is quasi-true. But if X A's at T3, presentism is either compatible with (1)'s literal truth, or it is incompatible with (1)'s literal truth—in which case (1) is quasi-true, since it falls short of literal truth "only in virtue of certain nonempirical or philosophical facts," namely, those constituting presentism. That means that the argument for theological fatalism can be restarted with the notion of quasi-truth:

(1#) It is true at T1 that it is quasi-true that X will do A at T3.

The following steps are justified in exactly the same ways as the corresponding steps in the original argument:

(2#) God knows at T1 that it is quasi-true that X will do A at T3.

(3#) God believes at T1 that it is quasi-true that X will do A at T3.

(4#) It is accidentally necessary at T2 that God believed at T1 that it is quasi-true that X will do A at T3.

(5#) It is accidentally necessary at T2 that it is quasi-true that X will do A at T3.

At this point the notion of quasi-truth is dropped and the argument continues as in the original:

(6) X cannot refrain from doing A at T3.

(7) X does not do A at T3 *freely*.

Why suppose that (5#), in which accidental necessity governs a proposition that is only quasi-true, is sufficient for (6)? Suppose that (6) is false. If X were to refrain from A-ing at T3, it wouldn't have been quasi-true at any earlier time that X will A at T3. But then it can't have been accidentally necessary at T2 that it was quasi-true that X will A at T3. Since the falsity of (6) is sufficient for the falsity of (5#), (5#) is sufficient for (6). So the argument for theological fatalism based on quasi-truth appears to be just as effective as the one based on truth.

I conclude that the aporetic problem posed by the argument for theological fatalism cannot be resolved on presentist grounds. If step (1) is where the argument goes wrong, it must be for some reason other than a presentist commitment to the unreality of the future.

Of course Prior's principal objection to (1) in "The Formalities of Omniscience" is grounded in his preference for a Peircean semantics, and that preference is defensible apart from his endorsement of presentism. I haven't done anything in this paper to address that objection. My narrower purpose in this essay has been to argue that if the assumption of future contingent truth is theological fatalism's original sin, it's a mistake to assign the greater blame to futurity rather than contingency. Hence the attention paid to presentism. But my general purpose has been simply to appreciate Prior's focus on steps (1) and (2) of the argument, and especially the support provided to (2) by (1). The debate stirred up by Nelson Pike's paper slighted these steps, treating them largely as prologue to the main event: the clash between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. But once divine foreknowledge of future contingents is in place, it's too late: freedom is unrecoverable, at least on the standard view of 'freedom' that's been assumed in the debate. It's the belated recognition of this fact that accounts for the recent shift in the debate toward the question of future contingent truth. In focusing his own examination of the argument on this question, Prior proved to be ahead of his time.¹²

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¹ An interesting record of this shift may be found in John Martin Fischer’s two edited anthologies on the problem of theological fatalism, published 26 years apart. The first, *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* [4], includes only one paper—Alfred J. Freddoso’s “Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism”—that engages Prior’s position, which it dismisses in short order. The second, *Freedom, Fatalism, and Foreknowledge* [6], has an entire section on “The Logic of Future Contingents,” including Prior’s classic “It Was To Be.”

² This formulation is identical to the one I give in [12].

³ Harry Frankfurt’s famous article, published just four years after Pike’s, presents us with another case of two conversations whose relevance to each other wasn’t recognized until much later. For a defense of a “Frankfurtian” solution to the problem of theological fatalism, see [10], [11], and [13]. I argue that Augustine anticipated this solution in [8] and [9].

⁴ I express some doubts about Fischer’s proposal in [14].

⁵ It seems to me, following Rosenkranz [24], that rejection of the “thin red line” rests on confusing *fixing* with *determining* (a unique future). But I’m not sure how to make progress on this question with those possessing contrary intuitions—another reason for taking things in another direction.

⁶ See, e.g., [16]. Merricks explicitly distinguishes his refutation of logical fatalism from an “Ockhamist” response relying on the soft fact/hard fact distinction

⁷ I develop the idea that theological fatalism should be treated as an aporetic problem in [13]. The material in the preceding two paragraphs is based very closely on that source.

⁸ Since our forebeliever’s properties can simply be stipulated, perhaps (1) is unnecessary. Suppose “Gob” is such that, if X A’s at T3, then Gob believed at T1 that X will A at T3, even though it was not then (at T1) *true* that X will A at T3 (perhaps because there *are no* future-contingent truths). But Gob’s beliefs, whether or not they are true, are *infallible*, in the sense that things cannot turn out otherwise than Gob believes. Then the argument for theological fatalism might be back in business, even though none of Gob’s beliefs about future-contingents were *true*. Suitably developed, this might constitute a third “fatalism for presentists,” in addition to the two discussed in the paper.

⁹ I owe this point to Brian Leftow.

¹⁰ Rea is not a presentist, but he offers his proposal on behalf of presentism; his own objection to presentism lies elsewhere.

¹¹ Including future contingents among the quasi-truths would accommodate, among other things, a straightforward acceptance of the commonsense practice of *prediction*.

¹² An earlier version of this paper was presented in 2013 at the Philosophy of Time Society, meeting in conjunction with the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, where Bradley Rettler was my commentator.