

Article



Special Issue: Author Meets Critics: John Martin Fischer's "Our Fate: Essays on God and Free Will"

Defending Compatibilism

Bruce R. Reichenbach

Augsburg University

Editor | Gregg D. Caruso, Corning Community College, SUNY (USA).

Correspondence | Bruce R. Reichenbach, 425 Maple Lane; Shoreview, MN, 55126, USA; **Email:** reichen@augsb.org

Citation | Reichenbach, B.R. (2017). Defending compatibilism. *Science, Religion and Culture*, 4(2): 63-71.

DOI | <https://dx.doi.org/10.17582/journal.sr/2017/4.2.63.71>

It is a truism that where one starts from and the direction one goes determines where one ends up. This is no less true in philosophy than elsewhere, and certainly no less true in matters dealing with the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human free actions. In what follows I will argue that the incompatibilist view that Fischer and others stalwartly defend results from the particular starting point they choose, and that if one adopts a different starting point about divine knowledge the logical incompatibility they envision and philosophically anguish over evaporates. I will also argue that the path Fischer and others tread has critical ambiguities that lead to conclusions that can be avoided if one clarifies the critical ambiguities. The result will be that choosing a proper starting point and clarifying the ambiguities will show that God's foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom.

Fischer's Incompatibilist Argument

We begin with Fischer's version of the conditional argument for incompatibility between God's knowledge and human freedom.

1. God exists and is essentially omniscient.

Omniscience might be characterized in two ways. One is that God knows all the facts that can be known (where facts are states of affairs that were, are, or will be the case). This is a claim about *what* God knows,

not *how* he knows it. The other is that God knows all true propositions that can be known, leaving open *how* God knows them. Since facts can be expressed by tensed propositions, for our purposes we will treat for the time being the two as equivalent, though the significance of this distinction is important, for some deny that propositional formulation of knowledge is appropriate to God.¹

2. Jones does X at T_2 .

This is assumed to be a fact about the world.

3. Therefore, God believed at T_1 that Jones would do X at T_2 .

This obviously assumes that God, at least in relation to the creation, has temporal features, and we will proceed as if this is the case.

Although theists advance divine foreknowledge in terms of knowledge, Fischer, in the company of other incompatibilists, uses "believe" in place of "know." We will argue that if we grant that God can have beliefs, only if all his beliefs come as components of his indubitable and complete knowledge can we properly use the term "believe." As we will see later, denial of the contention that God's states of knowing and states of believing are identical roots Fischer's incompatibilist argument.

There are, Fischer suggests, three possibilities about the past that derive from these propositions.

4. If Jones were to refrain from doing X at T_2 , then God would have held a false belief at T_1 , or
5. If Jones were to refrain from doing X at T_2 , then God would not have existed at T_2 , or
6. If Jones were to refrain from doing X at T_2 , then God would have held a different belief from the one He actually held at T_1 . (Fischer, 5; hereafter all in-text citations are from Fischer, *Our Fate*²)

Fischer goes on to reject 4, 5, and 6. He rightly rejects 4 because God as omniscient cannot hold a false belief. He rightly rejects 5 because God's existence cannot depend on human choices or decisions, or indeed, on anything contingent. But what about the counterfactual expressed in 6; why reject that? He rejects 6 because, in conjunction with

(FP) (Fixity of the Past): For any action Y , agent S , and time T , if it is true that if S were to do Y at T , some fact about the past relative to T would not have been a fact, then S cannot at (or just prior to) T do Y at T . (5)

Proposition 6, he contends, leads to

7. Jones cannot do Y at T_2 ,

that is, to the conclusion that humans are not free to do otherwise than they do. According to FP, "not only cannot one *causally affect* the past, but also that one cannot so act that the past would have been different from what it actually was" (60).

To determine whether FP is true we need to understand what Fischer means by "some fact about the past...would not have been a fact." I take it that what he means is that something in the past was a fact and now is not a fact. That is, there was a fact X prior to T but no longer (after T) is X a fact. For both Fischer and the compatibilist this is unacceptable, since a (hard) fact is what it is and cannot later fail to obtain. There is no back-tracking on hard facts (103–6).³ If this is what he means, FP is true, for if doing Y entails a contradiction, S cannot do Y .

But FP, so understood, together with 6 does not yield 7. Proposition 6 is a counterfactual that says that if Jones refrains from doing X and instead does Y , God

would have held a belief different from what he held, namely, that Jones does X . That is, if Jones does Y , God would have believed that Jones does Y , not that he does X . Compatibilists do not hold in the case of divine foreknowledge of human free actions that S being able to do Y requires some fact not to be a fact. That is, compatibilists do not hold that God had a belief at one time and then later believed its negation. In short, understood in the above way, FP may be true but is irrelevant to the compatibilist's understanding of divine foreknowledge. The reason is that the antecedent in FP as applied to God's knowledge is false. Consequently, it along with 6 simply does not lead to 7.

To make this clear, consider a re-write of 6, identifying a fact about the past.

8. If Jones were to refrain from doing X at T_2 , then God would have believed at T_1 that Jones does not do X at T_2 .

If Jones does Y instead of X , then God would have believed that Jones does Y and not X . There would not have been a prior fact that God believed that Jones does X because Jones in fact does Y , not X . Proposition 3 would never have been true. Because one cannot alter the past, God's belief about Jones does not change; it is just that whatever Jones does, God believes. But then there is no incompatibility between God's belief about Jones and Jones's freedom either to do X or not to do X . Proposition 8, as a counterfactual, is perfectly compatible with 3 and with Jones's freedom to do Y . What God believes depends on what Jones does. If Jones does X , God always believes that. Could Jones do Y ? Yes, because in case Jones does Y , God believes that and not 3. What follows from 6 and 8 is not that Jones *cannot* do other than X at T_2 but rather that Jones *does* not do other than X at T_2 .⁴

Possible-worlds Formulation of Incompatibilism

Fischer holds that even if the incompatibilist's argument based on FP fails, other versions proceed unscathed. Hence, he goes on to present a possible-worlds formulation of the argument, in the process revising FP in possible-worlds terminology.

(FP*) An agent X has it in his power at (or just prior to) T in possible world w to do X only if there is a possible world w^* with the same past as that

of w up to T in which S does X at T . (11, 111).

Given 1-3 above,

9. That God believes at T_1 that Jones will do X entails that Jones does X at T_2 . (From God's essential omniscience)
10. In all possible worlds in which God believes at T_1 that Jones would do X at T_2 , Jones does X at T_2 . (from possible-worlds definition of entailment)
11. Therefore, in any possible world in which Jones does not do X at T_2 , God does not believe at T_1 that Jones will do X at T_2 .
12. Therefore, Jones does not have it in his power at or just prior to T_2 to refrain from doing X at T_2 . (From 11 and FP*)

Unfortunately, 12 does not follow from 11 and FP*. What God knows (and hence believes) depends (in an epistemological sense relating to the ground for the belief) upon what Jones does. If Jones does X , then God has always known that Jones would do X , and if Jones does Y , God always knows that as well. Whichever Jones does determines the part of w and w^* up to T_2 that concerns God's belief about what Jones does. Hence, 9 is trivially true, for what God believes or knows about what Jones does at T_2 depends epistemically for its truth-grounding entirely on what Jones does at T_2 , and hence is entailed by what God believes and God's omniscience. Further, 11 does not entail that Jones could not have done otherwise, only that Jones does not do otherwise and God does not believe that he does otherwise.

The dispute comes down to this. The incompatibilist and compatibilist both agree that there is no possible world in which God knows Jones does X (or believes, taking "believe" and "know" as equivalent in God's case) and Jones does Y . The *incompatibilist* takes this to mean that if God knows Jones does X , then Jones cannot do Y . God's knowledge or belief is a fact about the past and cannot change. But for Jones to be able to do Y , God's knowledge must be able to change. The *compatibilist* takes it to mean that if Jones does Y , there is no possible world in which Jones does Y and in which God believes (knows) that Jones does X . If Jones does Y , then God (always) believes that Jones does Y . The same, of course, goes for Jones doing X . In other words, they agree that, since God's knowledge is infallible, what God believes must match what Jones does. The compatibilist takes from this that no

possible world exists in which Jones does something that God does not believe. It is not that if Jones does Y rather than X , God's belief must change or be different from what it was; it never was or could be the case that he believed Jones does X in such a case. It is Jones doing it that determines what God believes. Thus, counterfactually, Jones could always have done other than he did. Jones's freedom is preserved; what God believes depends on what Jones does.

From his discussion, it seems that Fischer will reply that we have substituted "know" for "believe," and these are two different mental states, both for us and for God. And this will get us to our radically different starting points. We will argue that, unlike us, "God can have beliefs only as components of knowledge."⁵ To Fischer's discussion of how God knows we now turn.

God's as an Evidentialist

As I noted at the outset, the position one ends up with depends both upon where one starts and the decisions one makes along the way. Fischer begins with an account of human knowledge. "When a human being who believes that p is in a knowledge conferring situation (KCS) with respect to p , and p turns out to be true, she thereby has knowledge that p " (36). Since for Fischer knowledge is unified in that all individuals—human, divine, and otherwise—who find themselves in a KCS where they believe p and p turns out to be true have knowledge, this account applies to God as well. This, as it stands seems uncontroversial, though perhaps trivial. Each type of individual that can have beliefs could be said to know p provided it is in a KCS with respect to p , believes p , and p is true. The critical ambiguity in this account is whether these diverse types of individuals must be in the *same* KCS, or whether the KCS can vary, even very considerably, among and according to the types of individuals. I find Fischer is unclear about this, but I think that he wants all the types of individuals to have the same KCS. I say this because in his incompatibilist argument he moves from features of the human KCS to attributing the same features to the divine KCS. Indeed, this contention is absolutely critical to his incompatibilist's case, which is modeled on human believing.⁶ Each of his discussions starts with the human KCS and from there moves to the analogous divine KCS. As he says, "we do wish to avoid ascribing mysterious and baffling properties and

powers to God” (142–43).

Fischer does not commit specifically to what either the human or the divine KCS is; indeed, even in the human case, as Fischer points out, philosophers widely disagree about the specifics of the KCS. One would expect the same for those describing God’s KCS. However, Fischer does make two important claims about the human and, in parallel, the divine KCS: they are both evidential and representational. Fischer addresses the first by claiming that God, like human beings, must believe based on sufficient evidence, “evidence that entails the truth of the believed proposition” (37). Knowing p based on evidence that entails p is what gives God certainty (and hence the knowledge that he is in a KCS).⁷ God is the evidentialist par excellence. At the same time, God possesses an additional advantage over us in terms of self-understanding; God knows that he is omniscient. Hence, God knows that if he believes p and is in a KCS that has sufficient evidence, p is true, and he knows p with certainty.

Yet not all of our knowledge is acquired by evidential inferencing. Some of our knowledge, such as perceptual knowledge, is immediate or intuitive, not inferential. I know that there is something (a flicker in my maple tree) because I see it outside my window. That what I see is a flicker and not a chickadee and a maple tree and not an oak may be inferential, but I do not make an inference to the existence of something perceived in a location but have direct or immediate experience of it. We might term this a basic act of knowing. As William Alston writes,

We might be able to distinguish, within a particular complex of perceptual experience, an aspect of sheer givenness or sheer awareness of something, from the conceptual or judgemental activity of taking this given as such and such. It might further be speculated that in early stages of individual psychological development, and in relatively unorganized psychological conditions of adult subjects (just falling off to sleep or just waking up, for example) we have the bare awareness element without the conceptual structuring. Considerations like this may give us some sense of what a purely non-propositional knowledge would be like. God can surely grasp any concrete whole fully, not just partial aspects thereof. And God has no need to extend His knowledge,

inferentially or otherwise, since it is necessarily complete anyway.⁸

Alston sees God’s knowledge not as propositional but as intuitive, which “represents the fullest and most perfect realization of the cognitive ideal, ... for the fact known is ‘bodily present’ in the knowledge.”⁹ But even if it can be expressed propositionally, it most likely is intuitive and immediate rather than inferential and evidential.

But suppose it is true that God must rely on sufficient evidence to know, what would be sufficient evidence for God such that the evidence (along with God’s self-knowledge of essential omniscience) entails that the future p is true? Surely, a large part of the evidence concerning future events would itself be future in nature, so that God’s knowledge would consist of strings of entailments leading from the present to the future. But would these entailments hold in a causally indeterministic world or a world with free agency? To use Fischer’s example, in a world of indeterministic free choice, Jones on Wednesday freely decides whether he will mow his lawn. In worlds w (where Jones mows) and w^* (where Jones does not mow) that have the same events up to the moment of Jones’s choice, even knowing Jones’s character and the state of the weather at T_1 , how would this information entail what choice Jones is going to make on Wednesday, or indeed, the Wednesday of a year or five years from now? Given all Jones’s possible intermediate choices, how can God know with certainty on Monday, as Fischer claims, that Jones will mow on Wednesday or the following Wednesdays? Would not the world have to be deterministic for these multitudes of extensive strings of entailments to hold with certainty? Coupling the inferential requirement with extensive human indeterminism effectively guts divine foreknowledge of human actions. Although Fischer contends his view allows God to have more knowledge than the open theists claim, I fail to see a significant difference on this evidentialist account, and both are problematic for the traditional theist.¹⁰

In short, the reason the incompatibilist problem arises, I suggest, is that Fischer attempts to accommodate God’s foreknowledge to our own KCS, which does not allow for such knowledge. Thus, he talks about fallible inference regarding the future, backward causation, bootstrapping, and the like, to overcome the gap. But the difference is plain and simple: by

having foreknowledge, God's KCS includes a way of knowing (and believing) not accessible to us. If one is to ascribe foreknowledge to God, one has to allow that God may have epistemic powers that are unavailable to us.

God's Beliefs and Hard and Soft Facts

God has foreknowledge, infallible and certain, a kind of knowledge that we do not have. Why then suppose that our way of knowing (KCS), which does not include foreknowledge, is totally (or even partially) analogous to the way God knows? Fischer develops his defense when he chooses to discuss the issue of compatibilism and incompatibilism in terms of hard and soft facts, the very defining of which has generated its own cottage industry.¹¹ He notes that Pike chooses to work with these terms in a pre-analytic sense. A hard fact is one that is "fully accomplished and over and done with' at the relevant time" (131); there is nothing more that can be done to make the proposition about the fact true or false. He terms this "resistance." Soft facts, on the other hand, are not over and done with; the truth or falsity of the relevant propositions remains to be determined after *T* (120-21).¹²

At the heart of Fischer's argument are three claims about the human KCS. (1) There are soft facts that have a hard-core component, that is, a part that is a hard fact or property. For example, although the overall fact of acting or occurring before something else happens in the future (e.g., giving a speech ten years before a Syrian peace treaty is signed; my alarm clock ringing a half hour before I actually got up) is a soft fact—since the entire state of affairs expressed by the proposition is not over and done with until later—, this past action or event (giving a speech or the alarm ringing) is itself a state that is fixed in the past, regardless of what happens in the future. (2) For humans, knowing differs from believing in that being in the state of mind of knowing depends on whether what one knows actually occurs (knowing a "future proposition exhibits a kind of *counterfactual dependent on the future*" (138)), whereas one can be in the state of mind of believing regardless of whether what one believes occurs. (3) God's believing about the future is a soft fact with a hard-core component. It is, in this sense, a hybrid. Like human believing, since it has the fixity of the past, it has the hard-core fact that God is in the state of believing. Unlike human believing, it is a soft fact since God having the belief is counterfactually

ally dependent upon the future. In Fischer's language, God's belief is resilient to the future. "God's prior beliefs are either hard-core or hard-type facts. In either case, ... they cannot be falsified without affecting some genuine feature of the past" (146).

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that (1) and (2) are true with respect to human knowing. The problem again arises with the interpretation of (3). If God has beliefs, his beliefs are identical with his knowledge. There is nothing that God believes that he does not know to be true with certainty, and there is nothing he does not know with certainty that he does not believe. And what God knows counterfactually depends upon the future, such that if that future event does not occur God does not know (and hence believe) that future event. If, as Fischer concedes (138), *knowledge* of the future is counterfactually dependent upon the future and hence consists of soft facts, the same would apply to God's beliefs. God would not believe it if it did not occur. Hence, like knowledge, the truth of the belief and God's very having of it depends counterfactually upon the future. Thus, a critical difference between God's beliefs and ours exists: Our beliefs are not identical to our knowledge, and hence the fact of our holding them does not counterfactually depend on the future but is a hard fact, but God's beliefs are so dependent and hence are soft facts. Hence, like knowledge, God's beliefs can be counterfactually falsified, but if so, the hard part of the fact—that God's believed *x*—would not change but would have been different *from the beginning*—God would not have believed *x*. They can be counterfactually "falsified without affecting some genuine feature of the past" (146).

Foreknowledge and Mental Representations

Fischer advances his case for using the human analogue of belief to understand divine belief by invoking a theory of mental representations, such that "God's belief states somehow involve mental representations, and that in a very broad sense these representations have formal properties" (139-40), and since they involve representing the world, they must be the same as or analogous to human mental states of the same representation. For Fischer, satisfying these formality conditions is necessary for the incompatibilist argument to succeed. Yet, how this representation would work with God Fischer cannot say. Since it cannot be physically instantiated, how close the analogy would

be is difficult to characterize. But still, he affirms, it must be so.

But why think that God's knowledge or beliefs are representational, requiring words or pictures. Perhaps God's beliefs are formed (if being "formed" is the right word to describe God's "acquisition" of beliefs) and entertained in a radically different way. This, of course, would not be unusual. The human KCS lacks many of the abilities or ways of knowing that are found in other animal species, and vice versa. We cannot know by sonar as dolphins; we do not sense objects like snakes with their heat sensitive organs or by echolocation as bats; we do not use ultraviolet light like houseflies and wasps, gravity like some invertebrates, or magnetic fields like bees to know our world. Hence, the details of the KCS of a dolphin, bat, or snake will differ greatly from that of humans and likewise, presumably of God. More specifically, in their believing, these creatures might not engage in representation at all.

William Hasker argues that while nonrepresentational intuition might work for God to know things immediately present to his awareness, "there is a requirement for an inner mental representation on God's part, to enable him to know what has passed away or (perhaps) what is yet to come" (Hasker, 391). And from the fact that inner mental representations are necessary for knowing the past and possibly the future, he concludes that they are also necessary for God's knowledge of the present, such that God has beliefs that, because of Occam's razor, must be described in ways that involve inferencing. But must there be representations for knowledge of the past (memory) or of the future? Given that at least some of the animals mentioned above appear to have memories from the way their past experiences bear upon and shape their behavior, still we have no evidence that their believing or even knowing is representational. Again, William Alston,

A creature in our condition needs inner representations in order to be able to think about absent states of affairs, since the facts are rarely if ever directly present to our consciousness. But since God enjoys the highest form of knowledge He is never in that position, and so He has no need for inner representations that he can "carry around with Him" for use when the facts are absent.¹³

But, Hasker asks, how can God know something without representations and noninferentially that has not yet occurred? We reply that if God has foreknowledge, it *may* be the case that God has this via a kind of immediate experience of the future event. If so, his knowing operates in ways both similar and different from ours. It is like our basic perceptual experience in that it is immediate; it is unlike it in that God can perceive things in the future in ways that we cannot. As Alston puts it, for God knowledge has a "trans-temporal character."¹⁴

But still, one might object, the compatibilist has not specified exactly *how* God knows future events when they have not yet occurred. For the incompatibilist, God's knowledge or belief about the future is in the past, so that it is not an open issue whether Jones does *X* and whether God knows or believes *X*. God cannot "wait" until Jones does it to have knowledge of it. For the compatibilist, God's *foreknowledge* of the future has two parts: *fore* and *knowledge*. It brings together two dimensions that we find difficult to reconcile from a human epistemic perspective. The "fore" refers to the time dimension, such that before the event occurs God knows what will occur. The state of God's "mind" before the event is one of knowing the event, indeed, all events, past, present, and future. It is not as if God "waits" until the event occurs to know what it is; he knows it (the event) beforehand. In this sense, God's knowledge is, as Alston terms it, trans-temporal, in that God can know at all times what Jones does. The "knowledge" refers to what God knows and its epistemic ground. God knows the event on the ground of its happening. Because (in an epistemic, not causal sense) it happens, God knows it. In this sense, God's state of mind is "open," not in a temporal sense, but in that what God believes or knows depends on what happens. Here the knowing closely resembles our immediate, non-inferential perceptual experience. If we treat God's mental state, either as a whole or in part, as intuitive rather inferential, it differs from our immediate experience in that it has a trans-temporal character. It is knowing in that God is in a knowledge conferring state (here, immediate intuition), believes that the event occurs, the event occurs, and God as omniscient is certain of it. This description provides some understanding of divine knowing, using categories derived from human epistemic experience. That I cannot fully explain God's knowing the future leaves it somewhat a mystery, and as we have seen Fischer

eschews mysteries in epistemology. But granting God the ability to foreknow requires that we go beyond analogues that lack this ability, and appealing to intuitive knowledge helps explain the general structure of why compatibilism works.

Does the compatibilist have to fully delineate how this type of trans-temporal knowledge, possessed by God—that God's knows beforehand what someone does and yet this knowledge epistemically depends on what happens—is possible? I don't think so.¹⁵ Indeed, I may speculate about but don't presume to know how God knows the past and present either. The claim of divine omniscience is only that God knows all facts that are knowable; it does not specify how God achieves this. But not fully knowing how God knows does not differ from the case of human knowing. Although I can give some details of the causal sequence that results in my knowledge or belief that Lake Owasso has no ice on it, I cannot completely specify how (the causal mechanism) I have formed this belief or attained this knowledge. I can specify certain features, from perceptual activity of seeing no ice but only water on the lake, to having certain neural activity. I can even try to specify what it is to know something, although, as Fischer acknowledges, multiple theories about what constitutes knowing abound. But the precise and detailed causal mechanism and epistemic requirements need not be available to me for me to make a belief or knowledge claim. It is parallel to knowledge of basic acts. I don't know how I can raise my arm but I can do so if I am in a normal physical state. I don't need to be able to explain how I do it in order to do it.

What is evident is that the problem is no longer that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom. Rather, it is whether foreknowledge is possible at all. If foreknowledge is to be analyzed using human models that lack this ability, if it requires representations, and if representations are possible only if what is represented has already occurred, then divine foreknowledge is not possible. But the issue now differs from the incompatibilism that occasioned the discussion. The discussion of incompatibilism began with the assumption that both foreknowledge and free choice were possible and concluded that if they are possible they are incompatible. Here the issue shifts to the much more difficult question of what foreknowledge about future contingencies would be like for God and what God can know. Since we lack

the ability to foreknow, our epistemic experience falls short in fully assisting us to construct the divine model.

I conclude that if God has belief states, they do not differ from his knowing states. The kind of logic that Fischer and other incompatibilists employ about knowing the future simply might not apply, for it is grounded on separating knowing and believing in God.¹⁶ If God knows p directly beforehand, then God can know about p in a way that p is the epistemic ground for his knowledge and belief. But even without this suggestion, the kind of KCS available to God regarding the future (and perhaps events present and past) will significantly differ from ours if we grant him genuine *foreknowledge*. This being the case, there is no contradiction between S freely bringing about p and God believing or knowing that S brings about p .

Conclusion

As I noted at the outset, the position one ends up with depends both upon where one starts and the decisions one makes along the way. Fischer begins with a theory that he calls the unified theory of knowing. For him, all individuals, human and divine, have the same knowledge structure: if they are in a knowledge conferring situation (KCS) and believe p , and p is true, it follows that they know p . As a very general description this is well and good, but Fischer goes on to assume that God's KCS (and perhaps that of many other creatures) is the same as ours. This starting assumption is absolutely critical to the incompatibilist's case. But while God has a KCS, there is no reason to think that God's KCS is the same as ours, especially with regard to his possession of a property that we lack, namely, foreknowledge. Whereas the human KCS does not allow significant foreknowledge, even on a fallibilist view of knowledge, traditional Christian theism holds that God's KCS allows perfect foreknowledge. Contrary to Fischer, unlike us, God most likely is not an evidentialist. On God's KCS, God probably has direct and not inferential knowledge of future events. God knows them intuitively, so that they are the ground for his knowledge and, concomitantly, the truths about them.

Further, for God there is no difference between knowing and believing. What he knows he believes, and vice versa. Hence, for God in contrast to us, his believing depends, not causally but epistemically, on

what happens. Consequently, the starting point of the compatibilist differs significantly from that of the incompatibilist. By restricting God's KCS to being like ours, which lacks genuine foreknowledge, and by distinguishing between God's knowledge and beliefs and by assimilating the latter analogically to fallible human believing, the incompatibilist has created the problem of divine omniscience and human freedom.

Second, along the way Fischer develops FP, sometimes accepting it, other times questioning it. But even if it is true, FP is irrelevant to the issue at hand. The compatibilist makes no such claim that it is possible that God has a belief (a hard fact) and then does not have it (another hard fact). If *S* were to do *Y* rather than *X*, no fact about the past relating to God's beliefs has changed. No alleged fact (like *X*) would have been a fact, for God would have known that *S* did *Y* rather than *X*. Hence, there is no reason why *S* cannot do *Y* at *T*. There is no fact with which doing *Y* conflicts. FP and its cohorts fail to further the incompatibilist cause.¹⁷

End Notes

[1] William Alston ("Does God Have Beliefs?" *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 288-91) suggests that, following Aquinas, one can construct a good case for God's knowledge not being propositional. William Hasker ("Yes, God Has Beliefs!" *Religious Studies* 24 (1988): 385-94) argues that it is propositional.

[2] John Martin Fischer, *Our Fate: Essays on God and Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Nelson Pike developed the contemporary version of this argument in "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* (1965): 27-46. William Hasker also develops a version in *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 73-4.

[3] Whether Fischer holds to the truth of FP is unclear. He both espouses its truth (118), and reneges on it (111).

[4] For my response to Hasker's presentation of the incompatibilist argument, see my *Divine Providence: God's Love and Human Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 155-66.

[5] Alston, 298. Alston, however, is dubious that God

has beliefs.

[6] Fischer acknowledges this starting point. "Nelson Pike conceded that if God's beliefs are construed so they are fundamentally different in nature from human beliefs, then his incompatibilist argument would not be sound. He pointed out that the argument gets its bite at least in part from the assumption that God's beliefs and human beliefs are similar in their essence" (143 n18).

[7] One might wonder how God knows that he is in a KCS. The obvious suggestion is that God knows he is in a KCS when his belief turns out to be true, but this is circular: he (by his omniscience) knows that *p* is true when he is in a KCS that includes *p*, and he knows he is in a KCS that includes *p* when it turns out that his belief is true. Furthermore, given the incompatibilist's treatment of God and the timing of God's beliefs about the future on the human model of knowing the future, God would not know he is in a KCS that includes *p* until *p* is true, meaning that there really is no foreknowledge in a world with indeterministic free agency. Both of these are problematic, the first because of its circularity, the second because it terminates discussion from the outset.

[8] Alston, 290.

[9] Alston, 297.

[10] See Reichenbach, chapter 8.

[11] For a very partial list of treatments of hard and soft facts, see references in Fischer, 132 n4.

[12] Subsequently Fischer adopts what he terms the Entailment View (132), according to which "no proposition that entails a future proposition is a hard fact about the past," a view that is problematic in that "no doubt *every* proposition about the past entails some proposition about the future" and hence needs to be qualified (Alvin Plantinga, quoted in Fischer, 132).

[13] Alston, 299.

[14] Alston, 301.

[15] I have explained this elsewhere using an "as if" sense of knowing, something employed in descriptions of time travel (Reichenbach, 161-3).

[16] We would make the same response to William Hasker, who claims that if two options are fully possible, “it is rationally incoherent for any being to say, in effect, ‘I *know with certainty that e will occur* is true.’ Not even God can know with certainty in an indeterministic situation which of two options will occur” (quoted in Fischer, 33).

[17] Special thanks to William Hasker for comments on this article. The position I defend, however, should not be attributed to him.