

The Blackwell Guide to the
Philosophy of
Religion

Edited by
William E. Mann

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Philosophy of Religion

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Preface

Whether one applauds it, deplors it, or is puzzled by it, the fact is that religious belief has survived any number of historical and cultural upheavals that had been thought to signal its demise. In similar fashion the philosophy of religion is alive and healthy despite attacks on its integrity from positivism, postmodernism, and deconstructionism. The essays contained in this volume amply attest to the vigor – and rigor – with which the philosophy of religion is presently being practiced. They have been written to be accessible to advanced undergraduate and graduate students and to members of the educated public. The authors, pre-eminent scholars in the field, not only provide an overview of their respective topics, but also further scholarly reflection on those topics. The next few paragraphs provide an overall sketch of the structure and content of the volume.

Part I The Concept of God

The major theistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, acknowledge the existence of a supreme being. This being, God, is generally thought by these religious traditions to be responsible for the creation and conservation of the world. More than that, God is supposed to care about his creatures, to know their innermost thoughts, joys, and sorrows, and to desire their flourishing. God is thus thought to be *personal*, inasmuch as he has a mental life consisting of beliefs, desires, and intentions. At the same time, however, theists insist that God is a *deity*, a status they emphasize by claiming that unlike humans, God is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and perfectly good. Many theists claim, further, that although humans live in space and time, God in some way transcends these dimensions of human existence. These assertions about God's nature have undergone extensive philosophical examination.

In Chapter 1 Linda Zagzebski examines the implications of supposing both that God is omniscient and that some of our actions are genuinely free, thus actions for which we are responsible. It would seem that if God is omniscient, then he knows in advance every detail of what we will be doing, long before we do it. But if God already knows now, for instance, what you will be doing one year hence, there seems to be no possibility that you will be able to do otherwise than what God now knows you will do. Thus, your actions a year from now – for that matter, at *any* time in the future – appear to be unfree if God already knows them. Zagzebski probes these and related issues.

Hugh J. McCann, in Chapter 2, discusses a series of problems that arise from the supposition that God is omnipotent. As McCann puts it, it seems that “to the extent that we maximize God’s power in creating the world, we tend to minimize the powers of the things he creates.” Consider, for example, the action of a cue ball striking the eight-ball. If God’s power is required to keep the created world in existence from one moment to the next, are we not simply mistaken in thinking that the cue ball is the cause of the eight-ball’s moving? Or suppose that we think that squares have four sides “by definition.” Could it be, nevertheless, that omnipotent God has the power to create a five-sided square?

Brian Leftow’s chapter examines the philosophical implications of the Biblical conception of God as existing “from everlasting to everlasting” and the related claim that God is immutable. Most theists agree that God exists at every moment of time. But beneath that surface agreement there lurks a fundamental disagreement about whether God is “in” time, as creatures are, progressing from past to present to future, or whether what we creatures regard as past, present, and future is all simultaneously present to God. Leftow sheds new light on these issues.

Part II The Existence of God

One undertaking is to define the concept of a thing. Another is to determine whether anything exists that fits the concept. A Greek mythologist can specify precisely what a gorgon is without believing for a moment that there are, or ever were, any gorgons. Even if we were to converge on a uniform conception of God, it would still be an open question whether God, as so conceived, exists.

Some philosophers have sought to prove God’s existence by showing that, unlike the case of the gorgons, God’s existence is entailed directly by the concept of God. For these philosophers no empirical investigation is necessary or appropriate: reason unaided by facts about the world can demonstrate the necessity of God’s existence. Arguments that purport to accomplish this feat are called ontological arguments. The most famous one was the earliest, formulated by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109). Anselm claims that anyone who reflects adequately on the notion of God as “something than which nothing greater can

be conceived” should come to realize that God must exist. Anselm’s argument has fascinated and outraged philosophers since its inception. It receives a thorough examination in Gareth B. Matthews’s chapter.

Various versions of the so-called cosmological argument for God’s existence take as their point of departure the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Cosmological arguments appeal to the intuitions that the universe might not have existed, that the explanation for its existence does not seem to lie within the universe itself, and that the cause of the universe should be something that cannot fail to exist. Interest in the cosmological argument has been rekindled in the light of the success of “Big Bang” theories about the origin of our universe. In Chapter 5 William L. Rowe explores some of the important historical and contemporary versions of the argument.

Big Bang theories have also stimulated a reexamination of arguments from design for God’s existence. Before the twentieth century, design arguments focused their attention on the structural complexities and functional capacities of living organisms, arguing that it was extremely improbable that such organisms came to be by chance. But if not by chance, then by design, and design implies a designer, who must be God. In the second half of the twentieth century physicists came to realize that it is also extremely improbable that the Big Bang should have produced a universe that was suitable for life. So once again a designer has been suggested to explain the fact that the universe is “fine-tuned” to be receptive to life. Elliott Sober examines both types of argument in Chapter 6.

The ontological, cosmological, and design arguments are all attempts either to prove God’s existence or to make God’s existence seem probable. Stacked up against them is the problem of evil. Stated briefly, the problem is this. If God is omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good, then God knows about all the suffering in the world, has the power to prevent or eliminate it, and wants to prevent or eliminate it. Why, then, is there suffering? Strong versions of the problem allege that the presence of evil disproves the existence of God. Weaker versions maintain that the presence of evil makes it improbable that God exists. In Chapter 7 Derk Pereboom surveys different versions of the problem, important theistic attempts to respond to it, and critical issues raised by those attempts.

Part III Religious Belief

Although many theists place some stock in one or another of the arguments for God’s existence, many of them do not base their faith on the arguments. Hence they are relatively unperturbed by criticisms of those arguments. And few believers abandon their faith upon finding themselves unable to give a definitive solution to the problem of evil. Aware of these phenomena about the fixedness of religious belief, non-believers accuse believers of cognitive irresponsibility. The intensity of religious belief, it is said, is nowhere near to being matched by the clarity of the

evidence. Theists sometimes respond by claiming that not all beliefs must be backed by evidence, and that non-believers themselves inescapably harbor some such beliefs. The essays in this section focus on various dimensions of the notion of religious belief.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam converge on some beliefs – that the world is governed by a wise, powerful, and good God, that Abraham is a pivotal figure in God’s relationship to humankind – but diverge on others. There is divergence among them, for instance, concerning the importance of a *bar* (or *bat*) *mitzvah*, or of baptism, or of making a pilgrimage to Mecca. How might one assess the intellectual responsibility of these kinds of religious belief in particular?

In Chapter 8 Alfred J. Freddoso points out that one way to go about such an assessment is to articulate a set of standards of rationality that would pass muster by reasonable people’s lights and then show that an individual religious belief conforms to or violates those standards. Freddoso’s approach is somewhat different. His strategy is to explore a whole network of beliefs constituting a particular faith, Christianity, “from the inside, so to speak,” showing how its various metaphysical, ethical, and psychological elements fit together.

William P. Alston’s chapter is an examination of the claim, made by some theists, that their beliefs are grounded or supported by their experiential awareness of God. Such awareness is sharply distinguished from ordinary sense perception, since the latter is confined to material objects while the former is alleged to be of a purely immaterial being. Alston explores in some detail the credentials of the claim for perceptual awareness of God by comparing it to the case that can be made for basing beliefs on ordinary sense perception of physical objects.

In the final chapter in this section, William J. Wainwright confronts the issue of how to appraise the phenomenon of religions whose beliefs do not merely diverge from the beliefs of other religions, but are incompatible with them. Wainwright assesses some responses that discount the alleged incompatibilities. He also discusses the prospects for “exclusivist” strategies, that is, strategies that maintain that one religious tradition is correct; thus, any religion incompatible with it is at least partially mistaken.

Part IV Religion and Life

Try to imagine a religion that has nothing to tell us about our origins, our purpose in life, our destiny, and that is equally silent about what is right and what is wrong, about how we should conduct our lives, and why. Among theistic religions perhaps the closest approximation to this stripped-down position was *deism*, a religious movement centered in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Deism rejected all religious teachings purporting to be based on any kind of divine revelation, maintaining instead that everything we can know about origins, purpose, and destiny must be based on and confined to our

natural, empirical knowledge of the world. Similarly, deism claimed that our knowledge of right and wrong did not depend on any specific divine revelation. Deists claimed that a benevolent God would see to it that all people at all times could come to know by natural means the principles necessary for their happiness.

As the natural sciences became more successful in the explanation of all sorts of phenomena, many thinkers came to harbor the suspicion that there was nothing left over for theistic religions to explain. And if each of us is naturally fit to uncover the ethical principles necessary for human happiness, then there seems to be no distinctive educational task that can only be carried out by religious authorities. In retrospect, then, deism appears to have sowed the seeds of its own demise.

The major theistic religions have insisted that deism is not enough. To the extent to which they claim, however, that there are important questions left unanswered by science and secular morality, they raise issues about the place of religion in scientifically enlightened, democratic societies. The essays in this section address some of the most salient of these issues.

Biologists estimate that over 99 percent of all species that have ever existed on earth are now extinct, and that the average lifespan for a species is approximately 4 million years. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have maintained that you and I are immortal. How can these religions be right if, as seems extremely likely, our species will become extinct? In Chapter 11 Peter van Inwagen discusses issues related to this question, devoting special attention to a fascinating argument, the “Doomsday Argument,” pertaining to what our expectations should be concerning species survival.

Deism was, at heart, an attempt to make room for religion within a scientific world-view. It thus offered the comforting prospect of peaceful coexistence for two enormously influential fashioners of human thought. In Chapter 12 Philip Kitcher questions whether any attempt to reconcile the two can succeed, and mounts a campaign on several fronts in favor of a scientific world-view.

Religions have been and continue to be pervasive in shaping the moral attitudes and institutions of their adherents. Some of those attitudes and institutions have been pernicious, fostering practices like racial and ethnic exclusivism and colonialism. Other religious attitudes and institutions have had undeniable beneficial effects. But could those beneficial effects have been brought about just as well by purely secular means? In other words, are there any values that are distinctively religious? In order to be in a position to answer that question we may need to grapple with another one: “What are the differences between a secular ethical outlook or system and a religious ethical system?” In Chapter 13 I explore a generic sort of theistic normative ethical theory, one that lays emphasis on divine commands, in particular, commands to love God and neighbor.

In the final chapter Philip L. Quinn probes two political ideals that can seem to pull their advocates in opposite directions. On the one hand liberal societies stress the value of religious toleration. On the other hand many defenders of liberal democracy argue that political arguments based solely on religious principles

should be discounted in a liberal society's debate over public policy. Quinn concludes that the cases hitherto made for religious toleration and for an exclusionary principle in political deliberation are fragile at best.

The aim of this volume is to present its reader with a number of talented philosophers examining a number of topics central to the philosophy of religion. It will have served its purpose if it provokes its readers to reflect further on these topics. As a guide to further reflection, at the end of each essay there is a list of suggested further readings, over and above those discussed in the texts of the essays.

Part I

The Concept of God

Omniscience, Time, and Freedom

Linda Zagzebski

Introduction

Consider the possibility that there is a being who has infallible beliefs about the entire future, including your own future choices. Suppose also that this being did not acquire these beliefs at this moment. He or she had them at some time in the past, say yesterday, or a hundred or a million years ago. That supposition, when combined with some very strong and quite ordinary intuitions about time and what it takes to act freely, leads to the conclusion that nobody acts freely. That is the main topic of this paper. It is not the only topic, however, because our exploration of the dilemma of foreknowledge and freedom will reveal a dilemma of foreknowledge and temporally relative modality that has nothing to do with free will.

The relevance of the foreknowledge dilemma to those who believe there actually exists a being who has infallible beliefs about future choices is obvious; the relevance to those who have no commitment to the existence of such a being but who think one is possible is less obvious, but no less real because the problem is one of conflicting possibilities. No matter what we think about the existence and nature of God, the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge forces us to rethink prior intuitions. Most people who reflect about this problem for long realize they have to give up something. To use Quine's metaphor, most of us have to give up something in our web of belief, and that means, of course, that a portion of the web will unravel. I will not presume to tell the reader which part of your web should unravel because I do not know where these beliefs occur in your web, but I hope to convince you that something has to break.

Here is the problem in the clearest terms I know. Suppose that tomorrow you will decide to perform a simple act, the type of act you would describe as freely chosen, if anything is. Perhaps you will decide what to drink with your lunch. Either you will decide to have tea or you will not decide to have tea. The law of

excluded middle rules out any other alternative. Suppose that you will decide to have tea. That means it is true that you will decide to have tea. If it is true, a being who now knows the entire future now knows that you will decide to have tea, and if that being had the same knowledge yesterday or a hundred years ago, then he knew then that you would decide to have tea tomorrow. And since his belief occurred in the past, there is nothing you can do now about its occurrence. Suppose also that that being knows in a way that is perfect. He not only is not mistaken, he cannot be mistaken in his beliefs; he is infallible. If so, he could not have been mistaken in the past about what you will do tomorrow. So when tomorrow comes, how can you do otherwise than what that being infallibly knew you would do? And if you cannot do otherwise, you will not make your decision freely. By parity of reasoning, if you will decide differently, the same conclusion follows. No matter what the infallible foreknower believed about what you will do tomorrow, it appears that you cannot help but act accordingly. And if that being knew everything you and everybody else will do, nobody does anything freely. This is the problem of theological fatalism.

Let us now make the argument more precise. Since much hinges on the way the problem is formulated, I will aim to identify the strongest valid form of the argument for theological fatalism in order to consider which, if any, premises can be rejected. I will make any principles of inference used in the argument other than substitution and *modus ponens* premises in order to make the validity of the argument transparent. I will then consider whether any premise can be weakened without threatening the argument's validity. This is important because even if one or more premises of a typical strong argument for theological fatalism is false, we should be on the alert for the possibility that a weaker and more plausible premise can lead us to the same conclusion, or perhaps the premise is not needed at all. And, of course, it is also possible that validity requires interpreting the premise as stronger than it is generally thought to be.

An inspection of the informal argument just given shows that theological fatalism arises from the conjunction of the assumption that there is a being who has infallible beliefs about the future and three principles: the principle of the necessity of the past, the principle of alternate possibilities, and a transfer of necessity principle. Here is a more careful formulation of the fatalist argument, making all four of these components explicit.

Basic argument for theological fatalism

Let B be the proposition that you will choose to drink tea with your lunch tomorrow. Suppose that B is true. Let "now-necessary" designate temporal necessity, the type of necessity that the past has just because it is past. Let "God" designate a being who has infallible beliefs about the future. It is not required for the logic of the argument that this being be identical with the deity worshiped by any religion.

- (1) Yesterday God infallibly believed B. [Supposition of infallible foreknowledge.]
- (2) If E occurred in the past, it is now-necessary that E occurred then. [Principle of the necessity of the past.]
- (3) It is now-necessary that yesterday God believed B. [(1), (2) substitution, *modus ponens*.]
- (4) Necessarily, if yesterday God believed B, then B. [Definition of infallibility.]
- (5) If p is now-necessary, and necessarily ($p \rightarrow q$), then q is now-necessary. [Transfer of necessity principle.]
- (6) So it is now-necessary that B. [(3) and (4) conjoined, (5), *modus ponens*.]
- (7) If it is now-necessary that B, then you cannot do otherwise than choose tea tomorrow. [Definition of necessity.]
- (8) Therefore, you cannot do otherwise than choose tea tomorrow. [(6), (7), *modus ponens*.]
- (9) If you cannot do otherwise when you act, you do not act freely. [Principle of alternate possibilities.]
- (10) Therefore, when you choose tea tomorrow, you will not do it freely. [(8), (9), *modus ponens*.]

This argument is logically valid. The next task is to investigate the extent to which its premises can be weakened without losing validity. The weaker and more plausible the premise, the stronger the argument. Perhaps this procedure will also show us where the argument is vulnerable.¹

The Premise of Omniscience

Let us begin with the premise that there is a being whose beliefs are infallible. Infallibility is connected with a time-honored attribute of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim God: omniscience. To be omniscient is to be all-knowing. To be all-knowing includes knowing the truth value of every proposition. It may include more than that if there are forms of knowledge that are non-propositional, but it includes at least this much: there is no true proposition an omniscient being does not know, and an omniscient being does not believe any false proposition. Like other divine perfections such as omnipotence, omniscience has traditionally been thought to be a component of the divine nature. If so, God is not only omniscient, but essentially omniscient. The latter, of course, is stronger than the former. Essential omniscience entails infallible knowledge of the truth value of all propositions. A being who is essentially omniscient is one who cannot be mistaken in any of his beliefs, and for every proposition, he either believes it is true or believes it is false.²

Notice next that essential omniscience is sufficient for infallibility in a particular belief but is not necessary, whereas omniscience is neither necessary nor sufficient

for infallible belief. Omniscience is not necessary because a particular belief or set of beliefs can be infallible even if the knower does not know the truth value of all propositions. It is not sufficient because a being who knows the truth value of all propositions may not know one or more of them infallibly unless infallibility is included in the definition of knowing. As long as it is possible to know without knowing infallibly, there is nothing in being omniscient that entails knowing infallibly. Essential omniscience is sufficient for infallibility because an essentially omniscient being knows the truth value of all propositions infallibly. Essential omniscience is not necessary for infallibility in a particular belief, however, because there might be a being who has some infallible beliefs, but who also has some beliefs that are not infallible.

These considerations show that the problem of theological fatalism arises from infallible foreknowledge, not simple omniscience. Infallible foreknowledge is entailed by essential omniscience, and essential omniscience is no doubt the doctrine that motivates the supposition that there is a being who has infallible beliefs, namely, the God of the major monotheistic religions, but essential omniscience is stronger than is required to generate the problem. As we can see in the argument above, infallibility with respect to belief B is sufficient to get the conclusion that the agent is not free with respect to B. Widespread infallibility generates widespread lack of freedom, and infallibility with respect to all future acts of created agents is sufficient to generate the conclusion that no such agent acts freely.

So far, then, we see that the first premise of the fatalist argument cannot be weakened to a premise that merely refers to the omniscience of the postulated foreknower, but it need not be so strong as to refer to the essential omniscience of such a being. Infallible believing is the crucial concept.

Can the first premise be weakened in some other way without threatening the validity of the argument? What about the attribution of beliefs to the being postulated in that premise? It has sometimes been proposed that God does not have beliefs; beliefs are mental states that only finite beings can have. That is because an ancient tradition in philosophy going back to Plato makes knowing (*episteme*) and believing (*doxa*) mutually exclusive states, the latter being inferior to the former. If so, believing is not possible for a perfect being. But even so, a perfect being is presumably cognitively perfect, and cognitive perfection involves being infallible in grasping reality outside of himself, including that part of reality consisting in human acts. Whether those states are properly called instances of belief is not important for the argument. Readers who find the term “believes” problematic need only reword the fatalist argument, using whatever word they think accurately designates mental states that can be infallible.

There is still one important way the first premise can be weakened without harm to the argument. Consider the modal status of each premise in the basic argument. The principles of the necessity of the past, alternate possibilities, and transfer of necessity are thought to be necessary truths, so premises (2), (5), and (9) are necessary, as are the other two premises, (4) and (7), which are definitions.

The logic of the argument shows that with these premises in place, infallible foreknowledge is inconsistent with free will in the sense of having the ability to do otherwise. If infallible foreknowledge is possible, free will is impossible. So the dilemma is generated from the mere possibility of an infallible foreknower; an actual one is not required. That is the reason theological fatalism is not only a problem for committed theists.

The Premise of the Necessity of the Past

The necessity of the past is critical to the fatalist argument. The idea that the past has a kind of necessity simply in virtue of being past is expressed in the aphorism “There is no use crying over spilt milk.” This idea is one side of a wider intuition that there is a modal asymmetry between past and future. The fixity of the past is understood in contrast with the non-fixity of the future. We will explore this intuition further in later sections, but for now the question is whether this premise can be weakened. Suppose that God, or the infallible foreknower, is not in time. Of course, if such a being is not in time, he cannot be a *fore*knower. Nonetheless, he could have the cognitive perfection of infallibly knowing everything. This idea is one of the oldest proposed solutions to the fatalist dilemma, going back to Boethius in the early sixth century and endorsed by Aquinas in the thirteenth,³ but I think that even though this move is normally understood as a way out of theological fatalism, it simply alerts us to a way that problem can be broadened.

In earlier work I argued that the existence of infallible knowledge of what is future to us threatens fatalism whether or not the infallible foreknower is in time.⁴ I am not suggesting that the generality of the problem can be demonstrated in a single argument, however. For a timeless knower, we need a different premise in place of (2) that refers to the necessity of eternity rather than the necessity of the past:

(2') Timeless states of affairs are now-necessary.

(3) then becomes:

(3') It is now-necessary that God timelessly believes B infallibly.

I recognize that (2') is not a common principle. Nonetheless, it seems to me that if there is an intuition that leads us to think that we can do nothing about what is past, a similar intuition would lead us to think that we can do nothing about what is eternal. A timeless realm would be as ontologically determinate and fixed as the past. Perhaps it is inappropriate to express this type of necessity by saying that timeless events are *now*-necessary. Even so, we have no more reason to think that we can do anything now about God's timeless knowledge than about God's

past knowledge. If there is no use crying over spilled milk, there is no use crying over timelessly spilling milk either. Of course, the nature of timeless eternity is elusive, so the intuition of the necessity of eternity is probably weaker than the intuition of the necessity of the past. Perhaps, then, the view that God is timeless puts the theological fatalist on the defensive. It is incumbent upon him to defend the principle of the necessity of eternity, which, unlike the necessity of the past, does not have the advantage of being deeply embedded in ordinary intuitions – I presume that most people’s intuitions about eternity are thin at best. Nonetheless, when we consider candidates for timeless truths such as truths of logic and mathematics, they are truths that are unaffected by anything we do. Clearly we have no power over mathematics. Whether we can do nothing about it because it is timeless or because it is mathematics is another issue, of course. But it is illuminating to notice that, leaving theological truths aside, every instance of a timeless truth is one over which human beings are powerless.

Premise (2′) might then be modified to make it clear that it is not ascribing a temporal modality to a timeless proposition:

(2″) We cannot now do anything about timeless states of affairs.

And (3′) becomes:

(3″) We cannot now do anything about the fact that God timelessly believes B infallibly.

With (2″) and (3″) in place, we can generate an argument for theological fatalism that parallels the basic argument. I do not think there is a more general premise than (2) or (2″) that covers them both, and certainly not a weaker one. They are just different modal principles. Their connection is not in content, but in a common picture of modal reality and its relation to human power. I think, then, that (2) cannot be weakened or broadened, but it can be shifted to a premise that applies to timeless knowing. The foreknowledge dilemma and the timeless knowledge dilemma therefore ought to be treated separately. In most of the rest of this paper I will concentrate on the foreknowledge dilemma because it is the classic problem.

The Premise that Freedom Requires Alternate Possibilities

Let us now look at premise (9), a form of the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP). It is possible simply to define freedom by PAP, in which case the conclusion that nobody acts freely follows by definition, but not by everybody’s definition. However, PAP can be defended by an argument that the existence of alternate possibilities is entailed by agent causation, the type of causation

libertarian freedom requires. If that claim is right, the conclusion of the fatalist argument is that nobody has libertarian free will, the kind of free will incompatible with determinism. Since those who think the kind of freedom we have *is* compatible with determinism are not threatened by the argument anyway,⁵ the claim that PAP is entailed by libertarian freedom is a significant defense of the important premise (9).

Several writers on PAP have argued that libertarian freedom does not require alternate possibilities, and I am among them.⁶ The crux of the argument is that the kind of power required for libertarian freedom is agent causation, and the thesis that human agents exercise agent causation is a thesis about the locus of power. PAP, in contrast, is a thesis about events in counterfactual circumstances. My position is that it is possible that an act is agent caused even when the agent lacks alternate possibilities. Or, to be more cautious, perhaps we should say that it might be possible. That agent causation and alternate possibilities can come apart is illustrated by so-called Frankfurt cases, or counterexamples to PAP originally proposed by Harry Frankfurt.⁷ Frankfurt intended his examples to give aid and comfort to determinism, but I believe he succeeded in showing PAP is false without showing anything that should lead us to reject libertarian free will. This issue is currently one of the most hotly disputed topics in the free will literature, and I will not attempt to engage directly with that literature here. Instead, I want to use the distinction between the thesis of agent causation and the thesis of alternate possibilities to show the fundamental irrelevance of PAP to both sides of the dispute over theological fatalism. This will permit the defender of our basic argument to give up premise (9) and still have an equally plausible fatalist argument.

Here is an example of a typical Frankfurt case used to show that an agent can act freely even when she lacks alternate possibilities:

Black, an evil neurosurgeon, wishes to see White dead but is unwilling to do the deed himself. Knowing that Mary Jones also despises White and will have a single good opportunity to kill him, Black inserts a mechanism into Jones's brain that enables Black to monitor and to control Jones's neurological activity. If the activity in Jones's brain suggests that she is on the verge of deciding not to kill White when the opportunity arises, Black's mechanism will intervene and cause Jones to decide to commit the murder. On the other hand, if Jones decides to murder White on her own, the mechanism will not intervene. It will merely monitor but not affect her neurological function. Now suppose that, when the occasion arises, Jones decides to kill White without any "help" from Black's mechanism. In the judgment of Frankfurt and most others, Jones is morally responsible for her act. Nonetheless, it appears that she is unable to do otherwise since if she had attempted to do so she would have been thwarted by Black's device.⁸

Most commentators on examples like this agree that the agent is both morally responsible for her act and acts freely in whatever sense of freedom they endorse.⁹ They differ on whether she can do otherwise at the time of her act. Determinists

generally interpret the case as one in which she exercises compatibilist free will and has no alternate possibilities. Most libertarians interpret it as one in which she exercises libertarian free will and has alternate possibilities, contrary to appearances. I interpret it as a case in which she exercises libertarian free will but does not have alternate possibilities.

For the purposes of the foreknowledge issue I am not going to address the standard Frankfurt case above. Instead, I want to begin by calling attention to a disanalogy between the standard case and the situation of infallible foreknowledge. In the standard Frankfurt case the agent is prevented from acting freely in close possible worlds. That is not in dispute. Black's device is counterfactually manipulative even if it is not actually manipulative. In contrast, infallible foreknowledge is not even counterfactually manipulative. There is no close possible world or even distant possible world in which foreknowledge prevents the agent from acting freely. Of course, if theological fatalism is true, nobody ever acts freely, but my point is that there is no manipulation going on in other possible worlds in the foreknowledge scenario. The relation between foreknowledge and human acts is no different in one world than in any other. But it is precisely the fact that the relation between the Frankfurt machine and Mary's act differs in the actual world than in other close worlds that is supposed to make the Frankfurt example work in showing the falsity of PAP.

To make this point clear, let us look at how the standard Frankfurt case would have to be amended to make it a close analogy to the situation of infallible foreknowledge. The device implanted in Mary's brain would have to be set in such a way that no matter what Mary did, it never intervened. It is not even true that it *might have* intervened. Any world in which she decides to commit the murder is a world in which the device is set to make her commit the murder should she not decide to do it, and any world in which she does not decide to commit the murder is a world in which the device is set to prevent her from deciding to do it if she is about to decide to do it. Now of course you may say that this is a description of an impossible device. Perhaps that is true. But the point is that it would have to be as described to be a close analogy to the foreknowledge scenario. And I propose that our reactions to this amended Frankfurt case are very different from typical reactions to the standard Frankfurt case.

In the standard case it at least appears to be true that the agent cannot do otherwise, whereas in the case amended to be parallel to the foreknowledge case there is a very straightforward sense in which the agent can do otherwise because her will is not thwarted by Black in any possible world. The machine is ready to manipulate her, but it does not manipulate her, nor might it have manipulated her since it does not even manipulate her in counterfactual circumstances. We might describe the machine as a metaphysical accident – an extraneous addition to the story that plays no part in the sequence of events in any world. My interpretation of the amended story is that Mary is not prevented from exercising agent causation in any world because of the Frankfurt device, and, by analogy, neither is she prevented from exercising agent causation because of foreknowledge.

Furthermore, the amended story is plausibly interpreted as one in which Mary does have alternate possibilities. I do not insist on that, however, since, as I have said, my position is that it is possible to lack alternate possibilities even when exercising agent causation. My point is that whether or not she has alternate possibilities, she exercises agent causation and hence is free in making her choice.¹⁰

This means that even if I am right that libertarian freedom does not require alternate possibilities and premise (9) is false, we are not yet in a position to reject the theological fatalist's argument. What the Frankfurt cases and my amended Frankfurt case show, I think, is that the existence of alternate possibilities is subsidiary to what is actually required for free will, namely agent causation.¹¹ And that means the argument for theological fatalism can be recast. Here is roughly the way the argument should go.

- (i) Yesterday God infallibly believed I would do A tomorrow.
- (ii) I have no agent power over God's past belief or its infallibility.
- (iii) Therefore, I do not have the power to agent-cause my act A tomorrow.

Looking back at the basic argument for theological fatalism, the place where the argument goes off the track is premise (7). I suggest that the defender of the argument can bypass the dispute over PAP by changing (7) to:

- (7') If it is now-necessary that B, then you do not agent-cause your act of choosing tea tomorrow.

(8) then becomes:

- (8') You do not agent-cause your act of choosing tea tomorrow.

And (9) becomes the much more plausible:

- (9') If you do not agent-cause your act, you do not act freely.

Now we have an argument for fatalism that does not rely upon PAP. Whether it is sound depends upon the kind of necessity possessed by the necessity of the past and (7') becomes the crucial premise. (7') is true only if the necessity of the past is a kind of necessity that prevents the power needed to exercise agent causation. I believe (7') is plausible, but probably somewhat less so than (7).

The Premise of the Transfer of Necessity

The final problematic premise is premise (5), the transfer of necessity principle. This principle says that the necessity of the past is closed under entailment.

Variants of this principle are part of every system of modal logic, so an attack on such a principle is unlikely to succeed without attacking the coherence of the type of necessity transferred. That means that the principle of the necessity of the past and the transfer principle ought to be considered together.

What exactly is the alleged necessity of the past? It is intended to be a type of necessity that the past has simply in virtue of being past. It is therefore a temporally relative kind of necessity; the past has it and the future does not. The intuition that the past is closed or fixed or necessary is therefore one side of a single intuition, the other side of which is the intuition that the future is open or unfixed or contingent. It seems to me that one side of the intuition is threatened by a defeat of the other because they are two aspects of the same idea, that time is modally asymmetrical. Now it could be argued that the intuition that the past is fixed is firmer than the intuition that the future is open, and that is possible, but notice that if it turns out that the future is fixed in the same sense as the past is fixed, the necessity in question cannot be a temporally relative one. The past could not then have a kind of necessity simply in virtue of being past if the future has the same kind of necessity.

Consider for a moment the reverse foreknowledge argument.

Reverse foreknowledge argument

Let B be the proposition that you will choose tea tomorrow. Let “now-contingent” designate the contingency of the future, the type of contingency that the future has now just because it is future. To say that it is now-contingent that B is to say that it is now-possible that B and it is now-possible that not-B.

- (1r) B.
- (2r) If E is a future state of affairs, it is now-contingent that E. [Principle of the contingency of the future.]
- (3r) It is now-contingent that B.
- (4r) If q is now-contingent and p is now-possible and necessarily (if p then q), then p is now-contingent. [Transfer of contingency principle.]
- (5r) It is now-possible that God infallibly believed B yesterday.
- (6r) Necessarily, if yesterday God infallibly believed B, then B.
- (7r) Therefore, it is now-contingent that yesterday God infallibly believed B.

And, of course, (7r) is no threat to human freedom.

This argument is generated from the other side of the intuition that time is modally asymmetrical, the side that maintains that the future is temporally contingent. The reverse argument does not rely upon any notion of a free act. What drives the argument is a variation of what I’m calling the transfer of contingency principle, which can be derived from the Transfer of Necessity principle as follows.

- (1) $\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\text{nec } p \rightarrow \text{nec } q)$ [transfer of necessity]
- (2) $\text{nec } (\sim q \rightarrow \sim p) \rightarrow (\text{nec } \sim q \rightarrow \text{nec } \sim p)$ [(1), substitution]
- (3) $\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\sim \text{nec } \sim p \rightarrow \sim \text{nec } \sim q)$ [(2), contraposition]
- (4) $\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\text{poss } p \rightarrow \text{poss } q)$ [(3), definition of “possible”]
- (5) $\text{nec } (\sim q \rightarrow \sim p) \rightarrow (\text{poss } \sim q \rightarrow \text{poss } \sim p)$ [(4), substitution]
- (6) $\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\text{poss } \sim q \rightarrow \text{poss } \sim p)$ [(5), contraposition]
- (7) $\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow [(\text{poss } p \ \& \ \text{poss } \sim q) \rightarrow (\text{poss } q \ \& \ \text{poss } \sim p)]$ [(4), (6), sentential logic¹²]
- (8) $[\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \ \& \ \text{poss } p] \rightarrow [(\text{poss } \sim q \ \& \ \text{poss } q) \rightarrow \text{poss } \sim p]$ [(7), exportation]
- (9) $[\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \ \& \ \text{poss } p] \rightarrow [(\text{poss } \sim q \ \& \ \text{poss } q) \rightarrow (\text{poss } \sim p \ \& \ \text{poss } p)]$ [(8), tautology]
- (10) $[\text{nec } (p \rightarrow q) \ \& \ \text{poss } p] \rightarrow (q \text{ is contingent} \rightarrow p \text{ is contingent})$ [(9), definition of “contingent” (transfer of contingency)¹³]

This pattern of argument can be used to derive a transfer of contingency principle for contingency of type Φ from a transfer of necessity principle for necessity of type Φ . In particular, the transfer of temporally relative contingency – premise (4r) of the reverse argument – can be derived from the transfer of necessity for temporally relative necessity – premise (5) of the basic argument for theological fatalism – by the above argument. It follows that an upholder of the transfer of temporally relative necessity is committed to the transfer of temporally relative contingency. The principles are logically related.

We now have two arguments: the basic fatalist argument and the reverse counterfatalist argument. Both begin with one side of the intuition that time is modally asymmetrical and argue by way of a transfer of modality principle to the conclusion that time is not modally asymmetrical. According to the basic argument, if the past is necessary, so is the future. According to the reverse argument, if the future is contingent, so is the past. Which of the two arguments do we choose? One answer is “neither.” The conclusion of each of these arguments undermines the intuition supporting the modality generating the argument – either the necessity of the past or the contingency of the future. The future cannot be as necessary as the past if the type of necessity the past has is supposed to be temporally relative. Similarly, the past cannot be as contingent as the future if the type of contingency the future has is supposed to be temporally relative. Both arguments are problematic, but since the reverse argument is as well supported as the standard argument, there is no more reason to adopt the one than the other. These arguments should make us suspect a problem in the notion of temporally relative modality. And perhaps we should have realized that even in the absence of the reverse argument, since the conclusion of the basic fatalist argument undermines the intuition supporting premise (2). It appears, then, that these arguments show that if infallible foreknowledge is possible, the modal asymmetry of time can be maintained only at the cost of giving up both transfer of modality principles. However, I will argue next that even giving up the transfer

principles is not enough. In the following section I will argue that the possibility of essential omniscience directly conflicts with the modal asymmetry of time.

The Dilemma of Foreknowledge and the Modal Asymmetry of Time

Have we now pared down the basic argument to the minimum necessary to get the fatalist conclusion? We have retained the premise of infallible belief about human future free choices, the necessity of the past (with worries about its temporal relativity), the transfer of necessity principle, and the principle that the necessity of the past is incompatible with agent causation. But the argument can be pared even further. Here is a dilemma I have proposed in earlier work that eliminates any premise about freedom, agent causation, or alternate possibilities, and that does not use a transfer of modality principle. The argument combines some features of the basic fatalist argument and the reverse argument. In one respect the argument uses a stronger premise than the basic argument since it arises from the premise that there is an essentially omniscient and necessarily existent foreknower. However, we will consider whether this premise also can be weakened.

Argument establishing the dilemma

Again, let B be the proposition that you will choose to drink tea tomorrow. As in the reverse argument, to say that p is now-contingent is to say that it is now-possible that p and it is now-possible that not-p.

- (1t) There is (and was in the past) an essentially omniscient foreknower (EOF) who exists necessarily.

The principle of the contingency of the future tells us that:

- (2t) It is now-possible that B and it is now-possible that not-B.

Since the EOF is necessarily existent, B is strictly equivalent to *The EOF believed before now that B*. (1t) and (2t) therefore strictly imply:

- (3t) It is now-possible that the EOF believed before now that B and it is now-possible that the EOF believed before now that not-B.

From (1t) and the law of excluded middle we get:

- (4t) Either the EOF believed before now that B or the EOF believed before now that not-B.

From the principle of the necessity of the past we get:

- (5t) If the EOF believed that B, it is not now-possible that he believed that not-B, and if he believed that not-B, it is not now-possible that he believed that B.

(4t) and (5t) entail:

- (6t) Either it is not now-possible that he believed that B or it is not now-possible that he believed that not-B.

But (6t) contradicts (3t).¹⁴

There are a number of things to notice about the strength of this argument. Free will does not enter into it at all. In fact, we can make the event in question a contingent event that is not a human act, if there are any. So denying any premise about alternate possibilities or agent causation will not get us out of this dilemma. Second, no transfer of modality principle is used, so it will not help to reject those either. The problem here is deeper than a problem about foreknowledge and freedom. It is a problem about foreknowledge and time.

The dilemma of foreknowledge and time does not have a reverse argument because no transfer principle is used. That means that the fatalist argument cannot be matched against a counterfatalist argument like the reverse foreknowledge argument given in the previous section. That also makes this new dilemma particularly strong.

Let us now consider whether the first premise of the new dilemma can be weakened without harm to the validity of the argument. That premise affirms the existence of an essentially omniscient and necessarily existent being. We have already seen one way that premise can be weakened in our discussion of the basic argument: The premise need only affirm the possibility of the existence of such a being. Actual existence is not required. But the premise can be weakened further. The foreknower designated in the first premise need not be essentially omniscient and necessarily existent. He need only have complete and infallible beliefs in some range of knowledge that includes propositions about the contingent future, for example, the food and drink choices of humans. In fact, the property of the foreknower that generates the problem can be limited to his relation to a single proposition. Let us consider a being who satisfies the following condition with respect to a future contingent proposition p:

Necessarily (Alpha knows p if and only if p).

Let us say that any being Alpha who satisfies this condition is *essentially epistemically matched* to p. Being essentially epistemically matched to p includes satisfying the following conditions:

Necessarily, if Alpha believes p then p (Alpha is infallible in believing p)

and

Necessarily, if p then Alpha believes p.

If Alpha is essentially epistemically matched to p then Alpha exists in every possible world in which p is true, but necessary existence is not required.

We can demonstrate that the existence of a being who is essentially epistemically matched to a proposition p is incompatible with p's having temporal modality by a modification of the dilemma of foreknowledge and temporal asymmetry. The argument proceeds as follows.

- (1t') There is (and was in the past) a being who is essentially epistemically matched to B.
- (2t) It is now-possible that B and it is now-possible that not-B.

B is strictly equivalent to *The being essentially epistemically matched to B believed before now that B*. (1t') and (2t) therefore strictly imply:

- (3t') It is now-possible that the being essentially epistemically matched to B believed before now that B and it is now-possible that the being essentially epistemically matched to B believed before now that not-B.

From (1t') and the law of excluded middle we get:

- (4t') Either the being essentially epistemically matched to B believed before now that B or the being essentially epistemically matched to B believed before now that not-B.

From the principle of the necessity of the past we get:

- (5t') If the being essentially epistemically matched to B believed that B, it is not now-possible that he believed that not-B, and if he believed that not-B, it is not now-possible that he believed that B.

(4t') and (5t') entail:

- (6t') Either it is not now-possible that he believed that B or it is not now-possible that he believed that not-B.

But (6t') contradicts (3t').

This is the strongest foreknowledge argument I know. It shows that there is an inconsistency between the existence of a being essentially epistemically matched to a contingent proposition B and the assumption that the belief-states of such a

being and the event that B is about possess temporally relative modality. Clearly, parallel arguments can be given that apply to propositions other than B, in fact, to any proposition about which it is possible that there is some being essentially epistemically matched to it. Together they generate a strong attack on the compatibility of the existence of any such foreknowers and the modal asymmetry of time.

Before examining our options in responding to the arguments of this section, let us look at an even more radical way of attempting to eliminate a premise without affecting the validity of the argument. The most ancient of all fatalist arguments holds that fatalism follows internally from the nature of time itself; it does not appeal to any premise about a foreknower. This is the argument of logical fatalism.

Logical Fatalism

Arguments for logical fatalism do not use any premise about infallible knowledge or essential omniscience. The logical fatalist argument does, however, use the transfer of necessity principle as well as the principle of the necessity of the past. Here is a typical strong argument for logical fatalism that parallels our basic argument for theological fatalism.

Argument for logical fatalism

As before, let B be the proposition that you will choose tea tomorrow.

- (11) Yesterday it was true that B. [Assumption.]
- (21) It is now-necessary that yesterday it was true that B. [Necessity of the past.]
- (31) Necessarily, if yesterday it was true that B, then now it is true that B. [Omnitemporality of truth.]
- (41) If p is now-necessary, and necessarily (if p then q), then q is now-necessary. [Transfer of necessity.]
- (51) So it is now-necessary that it is true that B. [(21), (31), (41), conjunction, *modus ponens*.]
- (61) If it is now-necessary that it is true that B, then B cannot be false. [Definition.]
- (71) If B cannot be false, then you cannot do otherwise than choose tea tomorrow. [Definition.]

The most interesting feature of arguments for logical fatalism in contrast with arguments for theological fatalism is that almost everybody finds the former unsound, whereas many more think the latter is sound. That means that the logical fatalist argument cannot be construed as an attempt to *strengthen* the basic