## BOOK SYMPOSIUM

## RESEARCH ARTICLES

## DISCUSSIONS AND REPLIES

# PRÉCIS OF
# "OUR FATE: ESSAYS ON GOD AND FREE WILL"

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In *Our Fate* I present a family of arguments for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise. The arguments are fueled by the intuitive idea of the fixity of the past. I distinguish different versions of the argument, and I contend that it is important to see that the arguments are different, even though they are motivated by the same basic intuitive ideas. One reason that it is important to distinguish the different members of the family is because we can thereby see that incompatibilism is not defeated, simply in virtue of showing the inadequacy of one particular version of the argument. I also reflect on the relationship between these arguments for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise and similar arguments for logical fatalism and for the incompatibility of causal determinism and human freedom to do otherwise.

I also consider various important responses to the argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise, including responses inspired by (or based on material in) Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Luis de Molina. I criticize these responses, with particular emphasis on "Ockhamism". In the end, I find the argument for incompatibilism about God's foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise compelling, *albeit* not apodictic.

I also give a new account of God's foreknowledge of future contingents positing free human actions in a causally indeterministic world. Many philosophers have thought that God could not have certain knowledge of future contingents in a causally indeterministic world, but I argue that this is false, and I attempt to show why.

Finally, I argue for Semicompatibilism about God's foreknowledge and human freedom. Elsewhere, I have defended Semicompatibilism about causal determinism and human freedom. Semicompatibilism holds that causal determination is consistent with acting freely, even if causal determination rules out freedom to do otherwise. (Obviously, this commits the Semicompatibilist to the claim that acting freely does not require freedom to do otherwise; Semicompatibilism is thus an "actual-sequence" theory of moral responsibility). In *Our Fate* I argue for Semicompatiblism about God's foreknowledge and human freedom. That is, I argue that God's foreknowledge is consistent with acting freely, even if it rules out freedom to do otherwise. In fact, Semicompatibilism is easier to defend in this context than in the context of causal determinism, insofar as God's foreknowledge need not play any role in the actual sequence of events leading to the action in question.

# THE INDIRECT RESPONSE TO THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

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**Abstract.** This paper develops an indirect response to arguments for theological fatalism of the sort defended in John Martin Fischer's *Our Fate: Essays on God and Free Will*. The presentation is intentionally crafted in such a way as to engage directly with several key aspects of Fischer's work, though it should be of more general interest. New details of the indirect response are supplied, and the dialectical value of the response is addressed.

## 0. INTRODUCTION

Among John Martin Fischer's principal aims in *Our Fate* (2016) is to develop and defend an argument for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise based on the notion of the fixity of the past. I'll call this argument the "incompatibility argument." The bulk of Fischer's defense of the incompatibility argument involves responding to objections to the argument which attempt to show that a particular premise or supposition of the argument is false or question-begging. In the rather different case of Fischer's engagement with Molinism, his aim is to expose Molinist "responses" to the argument as pseudo-responses, as their truth is utterly irrelevant to evaluating the argument. My concern here will be with an entirely different response to the incompatibility argument, one which does not focus on objecting to any particular premise or supposition in the argument, but rather attempts to challenge the argument as a whole in an *indirect* manner. It is a response developed in my (2014) with which Fischer engages very briefly in the new introductory essay of his book (41). My primary purpose will be to develop the indirect response here in a way that interacts directly with central aspects of Fischer's work and will provide him with an excellent opportunity to weigh in at greater length on its merits.

## 1. THE INDIRECT RESPONSE PRESENTED

The indirect response to the incompatibility argument begins with the un-controversial observation that all versions of this argument are attempts to prove a conditional: that *if* God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge, then no human person is able to do otherwise than what she does.

The next step of the indirect response is to highlight something else that must be true if this conditional is to be true: namely, that God's having ex-haustive and infallible foreknowledge requires the existence of *something* which explains why it is that no human person is able to do otherwise than what she does. The motivation for this claim is as follows. Those who de-fend the incompatibility argument do not (and should not) wed their defense of this argument to the view that the ability to do otherwise is intrinsically impossible. Instead, defenders of the incompatibility argument aim to show that, granting that the ability to do otherwise is intrinsically possible, God's having exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge would render it impossible. Divine foreknowledge and the ability to do otherwise are not *compossible*. But, once it is granted that the ability to do otherwise is intrinsically possible, there is considerable pressure to affirm that if it does not obtain, something *explains why* it doesn't obtain. Otherwise we are left claiming that there is no explanation for why things that could have obtained don't — an unfortunate commitment for a defense of any argument to require. If we grant this — that if no person has the ability to do otherwise, then something explains why this is so — then it will follow that every version of the incompatibility argument is committed to the claim that God's foreknowledge requires the existence of something that explains why no human person has the ability to do other-wise. For, every version of the incompatibility argument is committed to the conditional that if God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge, then the ability to do otherwise doesn't exist; and our argument here has provided rea-son for thinking that if this ability doesn't exist, there's an explanation for why it doesn't; so, every version of the incompatibility argument is committed to the claim that God's foreknowledge requires the existence of something that explains why no human person is able to do otherwise.

The third and final step of the indirect response is to challenge the claim that God's having exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge *does* require the existence of something that explains why no human person has the ability to

do otherwise (hereafter, "the requirement claim"). Challenges to this claim may come in varying degrees of strength. For example, one might challenge the claim by arguing that we are not in a position to know that it is true, or by arguing that we are in a position to know that it is false. And there are various other degrees of strength imaginable.

Regardless of the strength of the challenge one wishes to urge against the requirement claim, my suggestion has been to develop the challenge by ruling out the best candidates for what could fulfill the role it specifies. That is, my suggestion has been to attempt to show that for each of the best candidates for that which could be both required by divine foreknowledge and could explain why no human person can do otherwise, there is significant reason to doubt that this candidate in fact *is* both required by divine foreknowledge and *would* explain why human persons cannot do otherwise. The best candidates, in my view, are the truth of God's beliefs, the beliefs themselves, and the truth of causal determinism. I'll conclude this section by offering strategies for arguing that none of these candidates fulfills the role specified by the requirement claim. In the process, I'll be engaging with relevant work from Fischer's book. I'll also address two additional candidates I have not previously discussed that readers will recognize from Fischer's work — the "fixity" of God's beliefs, and God's being in a "knowledge conferring situation."

Start with the truth of God's beliefs. The proposal here is that it is the truth of God's beliefs that is both required by exhaustive and infallible divine foreknowledge and explains why no human person could do otherwise than she does. For example, if we suppose that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$, the proposal will have it that God's exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge requires it to be the case that, at past times, it was *true* that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$, and the fact that it was *true* at past times that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$. I have argued (2014: ch. 2) that this is a poor candidate for fulfilling the role specified by the requirement claim, because it is implausible that the truth of God's past beliefs explains why human persons lack the ability to do otherwise. For example, it is implausible that the fact that it was true at past times that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$. We can see why this is implausible by attending to the explanatory relationship between Jones's doing $X$ at $T_2$ and it's being true at past times that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$, where the kind of explanation with which we are concerned is the kind that figures prominently

in many of the discussions in Fischer's book — a relation of metaphysical dependence that is asymmetric and transitive.[1] There are four options regarding this explanatory relationship: either the past truth explains Jones's doing $X$, Jones's doing $X$ explains the past truth, there is a common explanation for both the past truth and Jones's doing $X$, or there is no explanatory relationship between the two. I've argued in my (2014: ch. 2) that only the second and third options are plausible, and that the third would imply that if anything, something *other than* past truth explains the absence of the ability to do otherwise. Thus, all that is left is the second option; and, notably, in his comments about the nature of soft facts, Fischer appears happy to grant that this option is correct (186, 191–2). He appears happy to grant, that is, that Jones's doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains why it was true at past times that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$. However, once this is granted, we can also see why it cannot be that the fact that it was true at past times that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$. For, given that the relevant explanatory relations are transitive — something Fischer also appears ready to grant (208–9) — it would follow that Jones's doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$. And this is something that the defender of the incompatibility argument, as we said above, should not want to maintain. It is tantamount to saying that the ability to do otherwise is intrinsically impossible. So, the truth of God's past beliefs is not a good candidate for fulfilling the role specified by the requirement claim.

For very similar reasons, neither are God's past beliefs good candidates for fulfilling the role specified by the requirement claim. The idea on this second suggestion would be that infallible divine foreknowledge requires past divine beliefs, and it is these that explain why human persons cannot do otherwise than what they do. For example, it is God's past belief that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$ that explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$. Notably, an argument paralleling that in the previous paragraph can be employed to show that past divine beliefs are not good candidates for fulfilling the role specified by the requirement claim, either. Again, focusing on the example of Jones, we can see this by attending to the explanatory relationship between God's past beliefs that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$ and Jones's doing $X$ at $T_2$.

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1   And so it is neither simply logical entailment nor counterfactual dependence. For Fischer's discussion of it, see ch. 1 and chs. 9–12.

Either God's past beliefs explain why Jones does $X$, Jones's doing $X$ explains God's past beliefs, God's past beliefs and Jones's doing $X$ share a common explanation, or there is no explanatory relationship between God's past beliefs and Jones's doing $X$. Again, I've argued (2014: ch. 2) that the only plausible views here are the second and third, and that the third would imply that, if anything, something other than God's beliefs explains why no person can do otherwise. Moreover, again, in various places in his book Fischer appears prepared to grant that this second option is correct.[2] That is, he appears prepared to grant that Jones's doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains why God believed in the past that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$. However, once this is granted, we can also see why God's past beliefs cannot fulfill the role specified by the requirement claim. For, if they were to do so, it would again follow from the transitivity of explanation that Jones's doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$ — something a defender of the incompatibility argument will not want to maintain.

A third candidate for fulfilling the role specified by the requirement claim is the truth of causal determinism. On this proposal, God's possession of exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge requires the truth of causal determinism, and the truth of causal determinism explains why no person is able to do otherwise than what she does. I have argued elsewhere (2014: ch. 2) that the truth of causal determinism is in fact the best candidate for that which is both required by divine foreknowledge and would explain the absence of the ability to do otherwise.

Very interestingly, Fischer has himself provided reason for rejecting the truth of causal determinism as that which fulfills the role specified by the requirement claim. This is because he thinks that infallible foreknowledge does not require the truth of causal determinism. Indeed, by articulating his "bootstrapping" view of divine foreknowledge (36–39), he offers an account of the mechanics whereby God might secure infallible foreknowledge without causal determinism being true. So, unless he is prepared to surrender the bootstrapping view and the more general point he wanted to employ it to defend — that infallible foreknowledge can be achieved in an indeterministic world — Fischer cannot endorse this third candidate.

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2    See his statement that such a claim "seem(s) just fine (223)." Cf. 221.

While I cannot discuss the reasons here, I myself think that Fischer's boot-strapping view is ultimately incoherent. Nevertheless, his attempt to articulate a way whereby infallible foreknowledge can be achieved without causal determinism being true *does* illustrate the kind of strategy I advocate for resisting this third candidate. The strategy I have advocated (2014: ch. 3) involves dis-joining what I call "conciliatory stories" about the mechanics of divine fore-knowledge. These are accounts of how God achieves infallible foreknowledge without causal determinism being true that have a non-zero epistemic status. If there are enough such stories, and their epistemic statuses are high enough, they can present a considerable challenge to this third candidate.

Since I'm not optimistic about Fischer's own conciliatory story, the reader might wonder what other stories I am more optimistic about. I'll briefly men-tion a few. By doing so, I aim to highlight the widespread appeal of the indi-rect response.

First, consider Molinism. As Fischer himself sees it (40), the aim of Mo-linists is precisely to provide an account of the mechanics of infallible divine foreknowledge that does not require causal determinism. Thus, to the extent that Molinism is an epistemic possibility, it can contribute to the indirect re-sponse. For this reason, I think Fischer's arguments for the irrelevance of Mo-linism for assessing the incompatibility argument are too strong. Molinism *is* relevant, if employed as part of a defense of the indirect response.

Second, consider divine timelessness. Specifically, I am thinking of ver-sions of divine timelessness which also affirm that God became incarnate in the past, and that God's past beliefs are explained by God's timeless beliefs (e.g., Rota 2010). On this sort of picture, Jones's undetermined act $X$ at $T_2$ ex-plains God's timeless belief that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$, and God's timeless belief that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$ explains the incarnate God's past infallible belief that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$. To the extent that this kind of picture is an epistemic possibility, it can contribute to the indirect response.

Besides these more well-known conciliatory stories, there are others. I have myself developed a time-ordering account of divine foreknowledge (2014: ch. 4), Jonathan Kvanvig (2013) has articulated an account of "Philo-sphical Arminianism," and some Thomists (e.g., Grant 2010) have attempted to provide accounts according to which God more directly controls our acts and thereby acquires foreknowledge of them, without this implying that these acts are causally determined. Altogether, these conciliatory stories present a

considerable challenge to the claim that infallible divine foreknowledge requires the truth of causal determinism.

Turn finally to two additional candidates for that which fulfills the role specified by the requirement claim. First, consider the proposal that it is the *fixity* of God's past beliefs that does the trick. God's having infallible foreknowledge implies that God's past beliefs are *fixed*, and his past beliefs being fixed explains why human persons cannot do otherwise than what they do. The problem I see with this approach is that, on Fischer's view (188, 231), the fixity of God's past beliefs is a feature they have simply in virtue of their having the more fundamental feature of being past (in the sense of "past" operative in the principle of the fixity of the past). However, it is a plausible principle that if something $X$'s having feature F explains why P is so, and $X$ has F in virtue of $X$ having more fundamental feature F', then $X$'s having F' explains why P is so.[3] It follows from this principle that if the fixity of God's past beliefs explains why no human person can do otherwise than what she does, then God's past beliefs themselves explain why no human person can do otherwise. Yet, we've already seen why it is problematic to maintain that God's past beliefs explain why human persons cannot do otherwise.

A fifth and final candidate is suggested by what Fischer says about God being in a "knowledge conferring situation" (a KCS) in his defense of the bootstrapping view (39–40). Fischer proposes that, just as human beings can have fallible knowledge of the future by virtue of believing claims about the future in the context of a KCS, God can be in this very same kind of KCS with respect to claims about the future. Of course, God can be in an even better quality of KCS than human knowers as well. In particular, Fischer endeavors to show that even in an indeterministic world, God can bootstrap himself to having infallible total evidence regarding the future by virtue of knowing his own beliefs and omniscience. For our purposes here, we are interested in evaluating the proposal that it is God's being in a KCS with respect to claims about what human persons will do in the future that is both required by infallible divine foreknowledge and explains why human persons cannot do otherwise.

I think it is important to distinguish two different interpretations of this proposal. On one interpretation, the proposal is focusing exclusively on what is common between God's KCS's and human knowers' KCS's. On this in-

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3    See (Lange 2013).

terpretation, the proposal is that it is God's being in the position of having fallible first-order evidence regarding what human persons will do that explains why they cannot do otherwise. Interpreted in this way, the proposal is not promising. For, the proposed explanans will not adequately predict the explanandum. God's possession of *fallible* evidence regarding what human persons will do is not an adequate enough predictor of what human persons will do for it to explain why they cannot do otherwise. Indeed, it is perfectly consistent with them doing otherwise.

On a second interpretation of the proposal, we focus on the total package of God's KCS, including not just whatever evidence God would share with fallible human knowers, but the evidence that enables God to have infallible foreknowledge. I offer a dilemma against this proposal. Either the evidence here is evidence provided by the truth of causal determinism, or it is not. If it is evidence provided by the truth of causal determinism, then the proposal is no different from the third proposal evaluated above. If, on the other hand, the evidence is evidence provided in some other way, then it is doubtful that this evidence will explain why human persons cannot do otherwise. For example, suppose the evidence is provided in the way proposed by Fischer's bootstrapping view. Then, part of the evidence will be God's own beliefs about what human persons will do. But, then, the proposal will be claiming that part of the explanation for why human persons cannot do otherwise is that God has past beliefs regarding what they will do. And this proposal will be subject to the same objection as the second proposal above. Thus, this fifth candidate is no better than the first three. As such, there is good reason to doubt the requirement claim. Consequently, there is good reason to doubt that the incompatibility argument is sound, even if we cannot identify exactly where it goes wrong. Notably, the reason provided is based on claims Fischer appears willing to grant.

## 2. THE DIALECTICAL SITUATION

For all the indirect response would appear to have going for it, might it be that it nonetheless merely leads to a dialectical stalemate? Fischer's own brief engagement with the indirect response in his book (41) suggests he may be sympathetic with an affirmative answer. The thought is this. Suppose we grant that the incompatibility argument is sound only if divine foreknowledge requires something that explains why human persons cannot do otherwise.

The project of the defender of the indirect response is to provide reasons for thinking that this requirement claim is not satisfied. However, the defense of the incompatibility argument should not be overlooked. This very defense itself provides reasons for thinking the requirement claim *is* met. So, what we are left with is reasons both for and against the requirement claim. And that is a stalemate.

I think this suggestion is correct in that, to the extent that the premises and suppositions of the incompatibility argument are defensible, this provides reasons in favor of the requirement claim. Moreover, if *all* that an advocate of the indirect response was to do was to defend the indirect response in the manner I have above, and if the reasons she offered in the process of this defense were no stronger than the reasons provided by defenders of the incompatibility argument, then I think we would have an irrevocable stalemate (not to say this would be an uninteresting conclusion!). However, my view is that a defender of the indirect response should not *merely* defend the indirect response in the way I have above. Rather, she should *couple* that defense with direct criticisms of the incompatibility argument that challenge key claims made in its defense. She should aim to expose perhaps several *potentially* problematic features of the incompatibility argument without needing to insist that her criticisms of any particular feature are devastating; and, in addition, she should go on to present the indirect response which provides additional reason for thinking that the incompatibility argument goes wrong *somewhere or other*.

What kinds of direct criticisms of the incompatibility argument might be offered? I'll briefly identify two. First, Fischer's preferred regimentation of the principle of the fixity of the past has it that hard-type soft past facts are part of the "past" in the relevant sense, and so must remain fixed in any world accessible from the actual world (26–31). But, this will imply that the fact that a certain inscription saying that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$ was true a thousand years ago is part of the "past" in the relevant sense, and so must remain fixed when we consider what Jones can do. This is because various properties of the inscription, such as it's *being an inscription*, are hard features of it, just like God's belief that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$ has the hard feature of *being a belief*, on Fischer's view. Yet, the resulting fatalistic consequences of true past inscriptions are not consequences Fischer wishes to wed himself to in the context of defending the incompatibility argument (e.g., 195, note 30). Second, Fis-

cher's defense of the claim that God's past beliefs are "past" in the sense of being soft past facts with hard features relies upon a questionable view of properties: namely, that when God holds beliefs at past times, God possesses the very same property that is possessed by human believers when they hold beliefs—viz., the property of *having a belief* (30). This view will be denied, however, by many who think that properties are particulars and who would maintain, for example, that in each instance in which God holds a belief in the past, he exemplifies a distinct property—the property of having *this particular divine belief*, or *that* one, etc. It is highly questionable whether these latter properties are hard.

These objections illustrate that central claims in Fischer's defense of the incompatibility argument are questionable, even if no knock-down argument can be given against them. When coupled with a defense of the indirect response as presented above, this puts considerable pressure on an advocate of the incompatibility argument. It's far for clear we have a dialectical stalemate here; and, even if we do, it needn't remain this way. There is a rich future discussion to be had about the incompatibility argument, and the indirect response should be an important part of that discussion.

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# HOW TO KEEP DIALECTICALLY KOSHER: FISCHER, FREEDOM, AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

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Fischer's *Our Fate* is a wonderful book, one that reminds us of just how much Fischer has contributed over the last three decades to the discussion of issues relating to God and human freedom. In this short commentary, I will (for the most part) limit myself to a discussion of the central issue on which the book focuses: a type of argument for theological incompatibilism — i.e., the claim that God's foreknowledge is incompatible with our freedom.

In the introduction, Fischer reminds us that there really is no such thing as *the* argument for theological incompatibilism. Rather, what we find is a family of arguments trying in slightly different ways to show that, since the past is not under our control, it follows that God's having infallible past beliefs about our future actions entails that those actions cannot be free. Fisher focuses much of his discussion on two principles regarding the fixity of the past. Some versions of the incompatibilist's argument, says Fischer, rely on what he refers to as a conditional principle of the form:

(FP)  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 $T$. (p. 5)

Other versions of the argument, though, rely, according to Fischer, on a possible worlds principle:

(FP*)  An agent $S$ has it in his power at (or just prior to) $T$ in possible world $w$ to do $X$ at $T$ 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 $T$. (p. 6)

A large proportion of the ensuing discussion examines the strengths and weaknesses of incompatibilist arguments built on one or another of these principles (or variations on them[1]).

Despite the centrality of these principles to Fischer's investigations, they are often presented with insufficient care. Consider (FP). By placing the reference to "some fact about the past" in the *consequent* of the embedded counterfactual, it seems to assert that the relevant fact about the past is a fact in the world in which $S$ does $Y$ at $T$, a world which (for all we know) has a very different past from the actual world. But would-be facts are not the ones on which the incompatibilist wants to base her argument. Her charge is that *actual* facts about the past are fixed — i.e., that if my acting in a certain way would require the falsity of some fact about the *actual* past, then I can't act in that way. A clearer way to formulate (FP), then, would be as

(FP$_1$)  For any action $Y$, agent $S$, time $T$, and fact $F$ about the past relative to $T$, if it is true that if $S$ were to do $Y$ at $T$, $F$ would not have been a fact about the past, then $S$ cannot at (or just prior to) $T$ do $Y$ at $T$.[2]

Another problem with Fischer's discussion of such principles is his failure fully to disclose the logical connections between them. Part of the difficulty, I think, stems from the manner in which the principles are consistently constructed. (FP) has the form of a universally quantified conditional with an embedded counterfactual: "If (if $A$ were the case, then $B$ would be the case), then $S$ cannot do $Y$." (FP*), on the other hand, has the form "$S$ has the power to do $Y$ only if $Z$". The structural differences — "If … then" for (FP), "… only if …" for (FP*) — and the linguistic variations — "$S$ cannot … do $Y$" in (FP),

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1    What is called (FP) on p. 5 occurs on p. 60, though the parenthetical "or just prior to" is absent. The (FP) of p. 100 is almost the same as that of p. 60, but slightly less formal: the "would not" and "cannot" of p. 60 become "wouldn't" and "couldn't" on p. 100. On p. 117, we find an (FP) identical to that of p. 60, except that the upper-case "$T$" is turned into the lower-case "$t$"; this version appears on p. 117 as well. Three pages later, on p. 120, the same principle, except that "hard" is added before the first "fact," appears under the label "(FPh)"; exactly the same version is used on p. 204, though there its name is "FPC". On p. 66, meanwhile, another version of the p. 60 version is offered, though here the agent is A rather than S and the principle is stated in terms of individuals' possession of properties. Readers should also note that the principles named (FP) on pp. 186 and 199 are actually variations of (FP*), not of (FP); a very similar variation of (FP*) is offered as (FPpw) on p. 126.

2    Fischer has agreed in conversation that the shift to (FP$_1$) could be considered a friendly amendment to his (FP).

"$S$ has it in his power … to do $X$" for (FP*) — camouflage the logical connections between the two principles. Once the superficial discrepancies between the two are eliminated, the relations between them come quickly into view.

Suppose we stick with the structure and language of (FP). We could reformulate (FP*) as:

(FP*$_1$)  For any action $Y$, agent $S$, time $T$ and possible world $w$, if $S$ can at (or just prior to) $T$ in possible world $w$ do $Y$, then there is a possible world $w^*$ with the same past as that of $w$ up to $T$ in which $S$ does $Y$ at $T$.

Consider now the contrapositive of (FP):

(FP$_2$)  For any action $Y$, agent $S$, time $T$, and fact $F$ about the past relative to $T$, if $S$ can at (or just prior to) $T$ do $Y$ at $T$, then it is not true that if $S$ were to do $Y$ at $T$, $F$ would not have been a fact about the past.

Let's isolate the consequent of (FP$_2$) — i.e.,

(C1)  It is not true that if $S$ were to do $Y$ at $T$, $F$ would not have been a fact about the past.

Clearly, (C1) entails:

(C2)  It is not true that, necessarily, if $S$ were to do $Y$ at $T$, $F$ would not have been a fact about the past.

From (C2), it follows that

(C3)  It's possible that both ($S$ does $Y$ at $T$) and ($F$ is a fact about the past).

And (C3) implies

(C4)  There is a possible world $w^*$ in which both ($S$ does $Y$ at $T$) and ($F$ is a fact about the past).

So the consequent of (FP$_2$) entails (C4). Hence, if (FP$_2$) is true, then so is

(FP$_3$)  For any action $Y$, agent $S$, time $T$, and fact $F$ about the past relative to $T$, if $S$ can at (or just prior to) $T$ do $Y$ at $T$, then there is a possible world $w^*$ in which both ($S$ does $Y$ at $T$) and ($F$ is a fact about the past).

Now, (FP$_3$) places no limit upon the extent of $F$, the fact about the past relative to $T$. This fact could be quite specific and limited, or it could be quite exten-

sive. Indeed, it could be equivalent to a large conjunctive fact including *all* facts about the past relative to $T$. In other words, $F$ could be equivalent to the entire history of the world (call it $H$) relative to $T$. So, from (FP$_3$), it follows that

> (FP$_4$)  For any action $Y$, agent $S$, time $T$, and history $H$ relative to $T$, if $S$ can at (or just prior to) $T$ do $Y$ at $T$, then there is a possible world $w^*$ in which both ($S$ does $Y$ at $T$) and ($H$ is the history relative to $T$).

The antecedent of (FP$_4$) implicitly makes reference only to the actual world. But presumably the proponent of such a principle would see it as having general application. Hence, anyone who endorsed (FP$_4$) should also accept

> (FP$_5$)  For any action $Y$, agent $S$, time $T$, and possible world $w$ with history $H$ relative to $T$, if $S$ can at (or just prior to) $T$ in possible world $w$ do $Y$, then there is a possible world $w^*$ in which both ($S$ does $Y$ at $T$) and ($H$ is the history relative to $T$).

Obviously, though, if $w$ has history $H$ relative to $T$, and $w^*$ also has history $H$ relative to $T$, then $w$ and $w^*$ have the same past relative to $T$. So we could rephrase (FP$_5$) as:

> (FP$^*_1$) For any action $Y$, agent $S$, time $T$ and possible world $w$, if $S$ can at (or just prior to) $T$ in possible world $w$ do $Y$, then there is a possible world $w^*$ with the same past as that of $w$ up to $T$ in which $S$ does $Y$ at $T$.

And (FP$^*_1$), as we saw above, is simply equivalent to Fischer's (FP$^*$).

The moral of this woefully long and pedantic argument can now be drawn. As we have seen, no one could reasonably accept (FP) without also accepting (FP$_5$). But (FP$_5$) is equivalent to (FP$^*_1$), which is simply a rephrasing of (FP$^*$). Therefore, no one could reasonably accept (FP) without also accepting (FP$^*$). Fischer's two principles, then, are linked more closely that he acknowledges: while (FP$^*$) *doesn't* (as Fischer notes) entail (FP), (FP) *does* (as he doesn't note) entail (FP$^*$).[3]

Though Fischer is surely correct in claiming that either (FP) or (FP$^*$) could be used to formalize a version of an incompatibilist argument, several consid-

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3    Or at least it all but entails (FP$^*$). Not every move in the argument I have offered is one that the proponent of (FP) is logically required to accept. Still, I cannot imagine a reasonable incompatibilist balking at any point in the argument.

erations suggest that the real question concerning the viability of such an argument is with (FP). First, as we have just seen, (FP*) comes along for the ride if (FP) can be defended; no separate argument for it is needed. Second, it's hard to see how one could justify (FP*) if (FP) were denied. Fischer usually presents (FP*) as an alternative to (FP), but typically doesn't try to make a case for accepting the former without the latter.[4] There's nothing necessarily wrong in his approach; his concern is usually to show that there is an alternative route to the incompatibilist's conclusion, not to defend that route. On the rare occasions where he does try to *defend* (FP*) as a separate principle, though, his argument strikes me as either question-begging or surreptitiously dependent upon (FP).[5] Finally, the incompatibilist's argument is supposed to be based on the general intuition that the past is fixed. But it's (FP), not (FP*), that seems to represent a genuine attempt to formalize that intuition. Suppose one embraces (FP*) but denies (FP). Indeed, suppose one denies (FP) in a rather dramatic (and implausible) way: by saying that, for *any* agent, time, and fact about the past relative

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4    An exception occurs in his discussion of his famous "salty old seadog" example. A sailor who was told at 9:00 that the weather would turn bad at noon and hence decides (as he always does when bad weather is forecast) not to sail at noon nevertheless, one might claim, *could* go sailing at noon, even though he *would* go sailing only if the forecast had been different. Fischer wavers on the extent to which such an example constitutes a counterexample to (FP), but he insists that the "could go sailing" claim is plausible only if we contend that it was at least possible for the seadog, even in the wake of the weather forecast, to have acted out of character by going sailing. But to grant this is to say "that the seadog can actualize a possible world whose past relative to noon is just like that of the actual world but in which he goes sailing at noon. If the world which he can actualize had a different past from the actual one, then it wouldn't be true that the seadog can act out of character" (111). Obviously, the seadog can actualize the world in which he goes sailing only if there is such a world. And so, according to Fischer, in saying that people such as the seadog can act out of character, we are in effect endorsing (FP*). The argument here is interesting, but unconvincing. The seadog's ability to act out of character may well require that he have access to a world in which much of the past stays constant (in particular, where the factors that we would deem psychologically relevant remain the same), but this gives us no reason to think he has access to a world in which all of the past remains unchanged, nor that there even is such a world. So the seadog example offers scant support for the claim that (FP*) remains unquestionable even if (FP) is called into doubt.
5    See, for example, the attempt on p. 185 to defend a near relative of (FP*) — one that, alas, is labelled as just (FP) on p. 186. The defense strikes me as rather opaque, but seems to rely crucially on the claim that "Plausibly … it's now too late for the past to have been different … Kennedy was shot, and, plausibly, any possible world now 'accessible' to one will include this fact." If this claim is not equivalent to our friend (FP), it's hard to see how the argument here isn't blatantly question-begging.

to that time, there's something that agent could do such that, were he to do it, that fact about the past wouldn't have been a fact. This radical denier of (FP) seems to be rejecting, in about as clear and wholesale a manner as one could, the notion that the past is fixed. Tacking on an endorsement of (FP*) changes this rejection not a jot. Hence, from a serious incompatibilist's stance, it's (FP), not (FP*), that's truly of interest.

But why accept (FP)? Why think that our vague prephilosophical intuition that the past is beyond our control warrants a claim as broad as (FP)? After all, as Fischer (and many others) have noted, if we accept a principle as sweeping and unrestricted as (FP) appears to be, then logical fatalism seems right around the corner. If it was true a hundred years ago that I will buy an iguana tomorrow, then, since that fact about the past wouldn't have been a fact were I to refrain from iguana-buying, it follows from (FP) that I can't do other than buy the iguana tomorrow. Or so says the fatalist. If we are to block such an argument, as Fischer clearly wishes to do, then we need to put *some* limitations upon how we specify our intuitions regarding the fixity of the past.[6] And once we start down this road, it becomes at least questionable that (FP) has sufficient plausibility to undergird an argument for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and freedom.

Indeed, even a version of (FP) limited to *hard* facts about the past is not beyond doubt. Alvin Plantinga implicitly calls such a principle into question via his much-discussed example of Paul and the ants. Suppose that some ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday. Were Paul to mow his lawn this afternoon, the colony of ants would be destroyed. For some reason or other, though, God wishes the colony to survive. As God knows, Paul in fact will not mow this afternoon. But if he were to mow, God would have foreseen his so acting, and (to save the ants) would have prevented their moving into Paul's yard last Saturday.

> So if Paul were to mow his lawn this afternoon, then the ants would not have moved in last Saturday. But it is within Paul's power to mow this afternoon. There is therefore an action he can perform such that if he were to perform

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it, then the proposition [that the colony of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday] would have been false.[7]

Clearly, Plantinga's story offers us an alleged counterexample to (FP), and hence a way of fending off the incompatibilist's argument. Fischer, though, is unimpressed. Though, he reports, many philosophers ("typically at or connected with Notre Dame!") find Plantinga's example convincing, he "has always been puzzled by this":

> it is obviously contentious whether (in the specific circumstances in question) Paul does indeed have the power to mow his lawn this afternoon!… The whole point of a skeptical argument — such as the Consequence Argument (in the context of causal determinism) or Pike's argument (in the context of God's foreknowledge) is to put into doubt whether we have the power to do otherwise with respect to ordinary actions — actions with respect to which we typically assume that we can do otherwise (apart from special assumptions, such as that causal determinism obtains or a certain sort of God exists). It is obviously not dialectically kosher simply to assume, in Plantinga's example, that Paul has the power (in the relevant sense) to mow… [O]ne cannot simply import ordinary views about our powers into the philosophical context of an evaluation of the argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom — a skeptical argument that explicitly challenges these ordinary views about powers. Plantinga is simply not entitled to assume from the outset that Paul has the power (in the relevant sense) to mow his lawn. (125-126)

What are we to make of Fisher's criticism? Has Plantinga transgressed the bounds of the dialectically kosher? I don't think so. His suggestion, it seems to me, is simply that it's *reasonable* to think that his story is a possible one — that is, it's reasonable to believe that Paul could have genuine alternatives and those alternatives be related to past events in the way the story suggests. The story, I think, is much more part of a *defensive* strategy than an *offensive* one. Despite his well-known evangelical credentials, Plantinga's endeavor here is (or at least should be) merely apologetic. His story isn't (or at least needn't be viewed as) part of a missionary endeavor to convert the incompatibilist; he's not saying "*Anyone* can clearly see that Paul has the power to mow, and if he were to do so, … ". Rather, he's saying (or can be read as saying) something far more modest, something along these lines:

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7    Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out", *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 3 (1986): 235–69. doi:10.5840/faithphil19863322.

> Look, I know that *you* (the incompatibilist) don't think Paul in my story has
> the power to mow. But I'm inclined to think that he does. And if he does, and
> if the rest of the story were true, then he'd have the power to do something
> such that the ants wouldn't have moved in. I think this is a possible story.
> So I think I'm fully within my rights in denying (FP), and thus in rejecting
> your argument. The story may not move *you* to abandon your theological
> incompatibilism, but that's not what it was intended to do. Its aim was to
> show how one who's *already* a theological compatibilist can coherently (and,
> I think, plausibly) maintain that view when threatened by your (FP)-based
> argument. And in that respect, the story succeeds.

For this reason, the charge of being dialectically unkosher strikes me as fun-
damentally misguided.

Indeed, those who consider the matter carefully are likely (especially, per-
haps, if they're at or connected with Notre Dame) to feel a Plantingean *tu
quoque* coming on. If *anyone* is making unwarranted assumptions here, one
might think, it's the one brandishing the incompatibilist argument, not Plant-
inga. After all, why think it's dialectically kosher to assume *from the start* that
(FP) is true? Plantinga's story could be seen as a way of showing that it's not.
For we could easily imagine his rewording the final lines of the paragraph
above in the following way:

> … if Paul were to mow his lawn this afternoon, then the ants would not have
> moved in last Saturday. But *for all we know — we can't at this point in the dis-
> cussion just assume anything one way or the other —* it is within Paul's power to
> mow this afternoon. So we can't assume that there isn't an action he can per-
> form such that if he were to perform it, then the proposition [that the colony
> of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday] would have been false.
> *And this means that we can't just assume that (FP) is true. But if it's not kosher
> to assume (FP), then the incompatibilist argument doesn't get off the ground.*

Fischer might respond to such a *tu quoque* by pointing again to the prephilo-
sophical backing for (FP) — as he puts it, "the intuitive idea that the past is
fixed" (117). And surely most of us do feel *some* tug connected with that
intuition. But, again, precisely where that tug should take us — precisely what
philosophical principles we should see it as mandating — has been a much-
debated issue in philosophical circles for a very long time. To suggest that
the vague intuition most of us have regarding the fixity of the past obviously
commits us to anything quite so controversial as (FP) is surely not plausible.

Fischer's complaint about the unkosher quality of Plantinga's response
to the theological incompatibilist is especially surprising given the fact that

Fischer endorses exactly the same type of response to the logical incompatibilist — i.e., to the fatalist. As noted above, the fatalist can offer an argument structurally parallel to that of the theological compatibilist, though with a version of (FP) not restricted only to hard facts. But Fischer (in a paper co-authored with Neal Tognazzini) finds such an argument wanting.

> Consider, for example, the fact that the assassination of JFK occurred 49 years before we wrote this paper… this fact relating the assassination of JFK to our writing this paper was true even 49 years ago. And yet it seems like we did have control over this fact; in particular, if we had waited until next year to write this paper, then although it *was* (and is) a fact that JFK was assassinated 49 years before we wrote this paper, it *wouldn't* have been a fact. (219)

But it's easy to imagine a fatalist, tutored by Fischer's response to Plantinga, replying to Fischer (and Tognazzini) in a parallel fashion:

> it is obviously contentious whether (in the specific circumstances in question) Fischer and Tognazzini do indeed have the power to wait until next year to write their paper! … The whole point of the fatalist's argument is to put into doubt whether we have the power to do otherwise with respect to ordinary actions — actions with respect to which we typically assume that we can do otherwise. It is obviously not dialectically kosher simply to assume, in Fischer and Tognazzini's example, that they do have the power (in the relevant sense) to wait until next year to write. They appear to import ordinary intuitions about our powers into a context in which they are not entitled to bring such intuitions.

Unless, then, Fischer is willing to accuse *himself* of not keeping kosher in his response to the fatalist, he had best not level such a charge against Plantinga with respect to his reply to the theological incompatibilist.

Suppose one were to ask what specific principle, if not (FP), *is* underwritten by our vague intuition that the past is fixed? It's not clear that the theological compatibilist is under any obligation to concoct a replacement. After all, it's the incompatibilist who's offering an argument here, an argument purporting to show that we *can't* be free given divine foreknowledge. If that argument fails because the principle upon which it relies is questionable, why think it's the *opponent* of the argument who's obligated to repair it?

So the dialectical burden rests squarely with the incompatibilist. Still, many compatibilists would probably feel somewhat uneasy about letting matters rest at this point, for at least two reasons. First, natural philosophical curiosity should goad us, if (FP) falls short of adequately specifying our inchoate sense that the past is fixed, to wonder how that vague intuition *should*

be specified. Second, many compatibilists with respect to foreknowledge and freedom are *not* compatibilists with respect to causal determinism and freedom. And many are inclined to defend metaphysical incompatibilism by appealing to some version of the Consequence Argument—an argument that relies crucially on the assumption that facts about the past state of the world and the laws of nature are not under our control. How, one might wonder, can the Consequence Argument be defended once (FP) has been jettisoned? For that Argument to be offered convincingly, don't we need to find a plausible replacement for (FP)?

Constraints of space preclude my giving these questions the attention they deserve. Let me, though, at least sketch a response. First, if natural philosophical curiosity is all we are trying to satisfy, then many theological compatibilists will probably contend that their overall philosophical positions provide them materials sufficient to fashion replacements for (FP), even if others who don't share their starting points will find such replacements wanting. For example, if one endorses the Molinist views on which Plantinga's ant example is ultimately based, one might well endorse a replacement for (FP) that makes explicit reference to middle knowledge. Needless to say, any such alternative to (FP) will be a non-starter for non-Molinists. But, once again, if one's aims are non-missionary—if one's goal is to soothe one's own curiosity, not to silence one's opponents—this limitation on it need not be seen as lethal.

On the other hand, if one's goals are more ambitious—if using the Consequence Argument to convert others to metaphysical incompatibilism is one's aim—then such sectarian principles will likely be of little use. It hardly follows, though, that *no* replacement for (FP) can be found that will do the job. For example, Michael Bergmann has noted that some facts about the past (e.g., God's past beliefs about our current actions) are plausibly seen as being facts *because* of what we do in the present; such facts, he suggests, are reasonably seen as subject to our counterfactual control. With other facts about the past, though, it's the other way around. For example, if causal determinism is correct, then I act as I do in the present *because* of how things were in the past (given the laws of nature). Past facts of this sort, says Bergmann, are *not* plausibly seen as under our control. Discriminate the facts about the past correctly, then, and one can fashion a version of (FP) that defuses the theological incompatibilist's ar-

gument while empowering the Consequence Argument.[8] Of course, even such a version of (FP) will not gain universal acceptance. But that, I suspect, is true of any principle the advocate of the Consequence Argument might propose.[9] What Bergmann's considerations show is not that the Argument is irresistible, but that one can reasonably formulate a non-(FP)-based version of the Argument that might well convert at least some opponents.

The mention of Molinism above leads me to a final (and somewhat peripheral) point. Fischer argues (in the delightfully titled "Putting Molinism in Its Place") that, whatever its virtues as a theory of providence, Molinism is of no use in responding to the theological incompatibilist's argument; it *presupposes* that there is an answer (of the Ockhamist, or Boethian, or some other variety) to the incompatibilist's challenge rather than itself endeavoring to provide an answer. Molinism offers a "nuts and bolts" account of how God knows the future: combine his middle knowledge (concerning what creatures would freely do in various situations) with his creative decisions (regarding which creatures will exist in which situations) and foreknowledge is the result. Such a "nuts and bolts" account may well be invaluable in building our account of providence, but it is not even intended to address the incompatibilist's worry.

While I think there is some truth in what Fischer says here, I fear that his remarks oversimplify the dialectical situation, and thereby underestimate the role that Molinism can play. After all, there are clearly two directions one can go in responding to the incompatibilist: show that foreknowledge and freedom are compatible, or show that their incompatibility hasn't been demonstrated. Suppose one is engaged in offering the second, more modest kind of response, and suppose one has pursued this strategy by, say, offering reasons to doubt (FP). Taken by itself, such an approach gives one only modest reason to think that freedom and foreknowledge *are in fact* compatible. All it tells us is that the *possibility* of an adequate "nuts and bolts" explanation as to how God might know our future has not been ruled out. But suppose one can come up with no such "nuts and bolts" account; every option one considers seems clearly and woefully inadequate. This would not *prove* that

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8    Fischer presents Bergmann's position on pp. 93-94; he replies on pp. 95-96.
9    For reasons to think that no version of the Argument can be expected to convince fully committed metaphysical compatibilists, see my "Compatibilism and the Argument from Unavoidability," *The Journal of Philosophy* 84, no. 8 (1987): 423–40. doi:10.2307/2027000.

incompatibilism is correct, but it should give one concern. By offering an attractive (well, attractive to many) "nuts and bolts" account of how fore-knowledge could co-exist with our freedom, Molinism can at least help to allay that concern. It's "place" in the overall discussion of the incompatibilist's argument might thus be somewhat more exalted than Fischer allows.

# FISCHER'S FATE WITH FATALISM

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**Abstract.** John Martin Fischer's core project in *Our Fate* (2016) is to develop and defend Pike-style arguments for theological incompatibilism, i. e., for the view that divine omniscience is incompatible with human free will. Against Ockhamist attacks on such arguments, Fischer maintains that divine forebeliefs constitute so-called hard facts about the times at which they occur, or at least facts with hard 'kernel elements'. I reconstruct Fischer's argument and outline its structural analogies with an argument for logical fatalism. I then point out some of the costs of Fischer's reasoning that come into focus once we notice that the set of hard facts is closed under entailment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Our Fate* (2016) collects some of John Martin Fischer's most influential and indeed most brilliant essays about the time-honoured question of whether divine foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom.[1] He argues that the prospects for a positive answer are bleak. Inspired by Nelson Pike's seminal paper 'Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action' (1965), Fischer defends various versions of what he calls the 'basic argument' for theological incompatibilism. Yet (like most authors) he rejects structurally similar arguments for logical fatalism. I reconstruct the Fischer-Pike argument, then formulate an analogous argument for logical fatalism and outline how, given Fischer's machinery concerning hard and soft facts, he could respond to this latter argument. However, the set of hard facts, I argue, is closed under entailment, at least when we restrict the consequents to contingent facts. The consequence is that on Fischer's approach facts that are intrinsically the same turn out hard in theistic worlds but soft in non-theistic ones. How could this be? Fischer owes us an explanation.

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[1]  Fischer has co-authored some of the papers with Patrick Todd or Neal A. Tognazzini.

## 2. INFALLIBLE FOREBELIEF, THE FIXITY
## OF THE PAST, AND FATALISM

Perhaps the most convincing version of the Fischer-Pike argument is the following possible-worlds version. Let 'God' denote the individual who necessarily has the divine attributes, where these include essential sempiternal eternality (or everlastingness) and essential omniscience (Fischer 2016: 2; cf. also 54, 84, 164–165, and *passim*; Fischer 1989b: 3–4). Moreover, we may say that "a person is [sempiternally, C. J.] omniscient just in case for any time $T$ and proposition $P$, he believes that $P$ at $T$ if and only if $P$ is true at $T$. Further, a person is essentially omniscient … if … he is omniscient in every possible world in which he exists" (Fischer 1989b: 4; 2016: 66, 100).[2] Theological sempiternalism is controversial, as is the claim that we can ascribe truth- or falsity-at-times to propositions. But I shall go along with these assumptions here.

Specifically, Fischer contends "that 'future contingents' are determinately true (or false) prior to the times they are 'about'. So if Robert cooks dinner on Tuesday, then it is true on Monday that Robert will cook dinner on Tuesday, etc." (2016: 67; cf. 1989b: 4). It is natural to think (and Fischer agrees) that the reverse holds as well, so the general point may be captured in the following disquotational principle:

(D) Necessarily, $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$ iff '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' was true at $T_1$. ($T_1 < T_2$)

(D) is not uncontroversial either. Peter Geach (1977: 47) has argued that we can 'change the future' in the sense that we can prevent things that were once going to happen and that would have happened had we not prevented them.[3] If Geach is right, the fact that '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' was true at some prior time $T_1$ does not entail that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$. But let us put this view to one side as well and assume that (D) or some similar principle is correct.

Fischer's final preliminary step is to introduce a principle about the fixity of the past. His possible worlds version reads:

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2    Since predicating truth of a sentence or proposition is a meta-linguistic activity, the third occurrence of '$P$' here should be put in inverted commas.

3    'Geachianism' has recently been rediscovered and helpfully discussed by Patrick Todd (2011).

(FP-1) "An agent $S$ has it in his power at (or just prior to) $T$ in possible world $w$ to do $X$ at $T$ 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 $T$" (2016: 17, cf. 84, 111).

(Here talk about 'doing $X$' is obviously meant to cover refraining from doing $X$.) Fischer then summarizes the basic argument as follows:

> Suppose that God … exists, and that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$, where $X$ is some ordinary act such as raising one's hand. It follows that God believed at $T_1$ that $S$ would do $X$ at $T_2$. Given God's essential omniscience, God's belief at $T_1$ entails that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$. Thus, in all possible worlds in which God believes at $T_1$ that $S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$, $S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$; so in any world in which $S$ does not do $X$ at $T_2$, God doesn't believe at $T_1$ that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$. It seems to follow from … [FP-1] that $S$ does not have it in his power at or just prior to $T_2$ to refrain from $X$-ing at $T_2$ (2016: 84).

It may be helpful to have a somewhat more schematic presentation of this argument to hand. In the present case, we can safely (re)translate talk about possible worlds into talk about things being possible and necessary. Thus, we may employ the principle:

(FP-1*) An agent $S$ has it in his power at (or just prior to) $T$ to do $X$ (or to refrain from $X$-ing) at $T$ only if it is possible that: a past obtains relative to $T$ that is identical to the actual one relative to $T$ and $S$ does $X$ (refrains from $X$-ing) at T.

The Fischer-Pike argument may then be formulated as follows.

*Argument A: the basic argument for theological determinism*

Suppose that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$, and that God exists and is essentially sempiternally omniscient (assumptions). Then:

(1) God believed at $T_1$ (the proposition that can be expressed, in English, by) '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$.'

(2) Necessarily, if (1), then $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$.

(3) The state of affairs described by (1) belongs to the actual past relative to $T_2$.

(4) $S$ has the power, at (or just prior to) $T_2$, to refrain from doing $X$ at $T_2$, only if it is possible that: God believed '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' at $T_1$, but $S$ refrains from doing $X$ at $T_2$.

(5)  It is not possible that: God believed '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' at $T_1$, but $S$ refrains from doing $X$ at $T_2$.

(6)  Therefore, $S$ does not have the power at or just prior to $T_2$ to refrain from doing $X$ at $T_2$.

Given the present assumptions, premises (1) and (2) are unproblematic. (3) follows from (1) and the stipulation that $T_2$ occurs after $T_1$. (4) follows from (3) and (FP-1*); (5) is just another way of expressing (2); and (6) follows from (4) and (5) by *modus tollens*.

Next, consider the following argument for logical fatalism:[4]

*Argument B: an argument for logical fatalism*

Suppose again that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$. Then:

(1*)  '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' was true at $T_1$.

(2*)  Necessarily, if (1*), then $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$.

(3*)  The state of affairs described by (1*) is part of the actual past relative to $T_2$.

(4*)  $S$ has the power, at or just prior to $T_2$, to refrain from doing $X$ at $T_2$, only if it is possible that: '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' was true at $T_1$, but $S$ refrains from doing $X$ at $T_2$.

(5*)  It is not possible that: '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' was true at $T_1$, but $S$ refrains from doing $X$ at $T_2$.

(6*)  Therefore, $S$ does not have the power at or just prior to $T_2$ to refrain from doing $X$ at $T_2$.

If we accept that future-tensed propositions can be true or false at times, then premises (1*) and (2*) are unproblematic; they follow directly from the as-

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4    In various places, Fischer compares the basic argument for theological fatalism with arguments for logical fatalism. Yet, so far as I can see, he does not consider the present version. Cf., e. g., Fischer (2016: 131, 151, 194f.), Todd and Fischer (2015), and Fischer (1989b: 12–14). For different formulations of fatalist arguments see also Finch and Warfield (1999), Mackie (2003), Finch and Rea (2008), and Finch (2017).

sumption and from (D). ($3^*$) follows from ($1^*$) and the stipulation that $T_1$ occurs before $T_2$. ($4^*$) follows from ($3^*$) and (FP-$1^*$). ($5^*$) is equivalent to ($2^*$), and ($6^*$) follows from ($4^*$) and ($5^*$) by *modus tollens*. How can one, as Fischer wishes, coherently reject Argument B but accept Argument A?

## 3. HARD AND SOFT FACTS

Fischer accepts the Ockhamist distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' facts about the past.[5] Ockhamists claim that (i) facts of the form: "'$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$'" is true at $T_1$' as well as (ii) facts pertaining to the occurrence of divine beliefs at $T_1$ about future human actions are soft facts about $T_1$. However, Fischer accepts (i) but rejects (ii). He argues that in this way logical fatalism can be avoided while the argument for theological incompatibilism goes through. Should we concur?

It turns out to be surprisingly complex to provide a precise characterization of hard and soft facts, and the controversies about this task persist. For present purposes, we may begin by noting that, intuitively, an (atomic, elementary) fact $F$ about some time $T$ is hard if and only it is only 'about' $T$ and not about any future time relative to $T$; that is, a hard fact is *future-indifferent* in the sense that its obtaining cannot be affected by any future event.[6] In Fischer's words, hard facts are 'temporally nonrelational' (2016: 12). Soft facts about a time $T$, by contrast, "may be genuinely about $T$ but are also (in some genuine sense) about times after $T$'" (*ibid.*). Todd (2013: 839) tries to capture the idea by saying that $F$ is soft about $T$ iff it "specifies an entity $E$ as having a property $P$ at $T$, and whether $E$ counts as having $P$ at $T$ is at least in part determined by whether there exists an event or events in the future relative to $T$." In their introduction to Fischer and Todd (2015), these authors prefer to capture the distinction by saying that soft facts about $T$ are facts about $T$ 'considered extrinsically', whereas hard facts about $T$ are facts about it

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5    The modern classics here are Adams (1967) and Plantinga (1986). See also, in addition to Fischer's work on the topic, the discussions in Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1980), Hasker (1989, ch. 5), Widerker (1989), Todd (2013), and Pendergraft and Coates (2014).

6    Atomic facts can be construed as true atomic propositions. Following Hasker (1989: 83–89), we could say that truth-functional propositions are future-indifferent iff their constituent propositions are future indifferent, and that quantified propositions are future-indifferent iff each of their pontential instances is future-indifferent.

'intrinsically considered' (Todd and Fischer 2015: 12–13). The fact that Donald Trump won the US election on November 8, 2016, is a hard fact about that time. (Indeed, it may constitute a *very* hard fact for the years to come.) By contrast, the fact that he won the election 30 days prior to my writing this sentence is a soft fact about November 8, 2016.

I have been talking about 'facts' as well as about 'propositions'. Time does not permit a foray into the metaphysics and semantics of facts and propositions. But I shall adopt a proposal from Hasker (1989: 89) and say that any future-indifferent proposition that is true is a hard fact. Soft facts about a time are true propositions about it that are not hard. Given this terminology, we may also talk of 'falsifying' or 'rendering false' a fact.

There is a second distinction in this context that we need to get under our belts, the distinction between facts that are 'fixed' and those that I'll call 'open'. A fact is fixed, roughly, if it is fully accomplished, or beyond anyone's control. It can no longer be falsified — no crying over spilled milk. It is open if and only if it is not fixed. Hard facts about the past are fixed. Yet, this must not lead us to think that all soft facts are open (see Fischer 2016: 13, 134, and *passim*; 1989b: 45). Soft facts can be fixed, too. For example, the fact that Trump was elected 30 days prior to the sun's going down today is a soft fact about November 8, 2016, but it is nonetheless beyond anyone's control. Some soft facts about the past are beyond our control for reasons other than the fixity of the past. Other soft facts, by contrast, are open. By refraining from writing I could have rendered it false that Trump was elected 30 days prior to my writing.

Now, Ockhamists relegate facts such as (1*) as well as facts such as (1) to the subclass of soft facts that are open. Fischer accepts the 'first half' of this claim, but rejects the other half: He denies that facts such as (1) are soft and open. His principal reason for this move is that divine beliefs, just like human ones, should be construed as cognitive states the nature and occurrence of which is not determined by what happens in the future. In the above example one and the same fact, Trump's election, can count as the fact of Trump's being elected 30 days prior to my writing these passages or as Trump's being elected 30 days prior to my not writing them, depending on what I do at the relevant time. Similarly, Fischer argues,

> [t]he only way in which God's belief at $T_1$ about Jones at $T_2$ could be a soft fact about the past relative to $T_2$ would be if one and the same state of God's

mind at $T_1$ would count as one belief if Jones did $X$ at $T_2$, but a different belief (or no belief at all) if Jones did not do $X$ at $T_2$ (2016: 14).

Of course, God's prior belief that $S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$ entails that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$. However, if some human being $H$ believes at $T_1$ that $S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$, then the "state of $H$'s mind that counts as his belief would *not* count as a different belief (or no belief at all), if $S$ were to refrain from doing $X$ at $T_2$" (2016: 138). And Fischer sees "no good reason to deny that the property of believing exhibits this sort of resilience [to the future] when possessed by God" (2016: 139).

There is a complication. Must we not concede to the Ockhamist that (facts pertaining to) prior divine beliefs about some later human actions are soft insofar as they do concern, at least in part, future times? Against this objection Fischer argues that, even if we grant this, the relevant facts about God retain hard 'baggage'; they have hard 'kernel elements' and thus qualify at least as 'hard-type soft facts' (2016: 136–139). "[I]t seems to me", Fischer says, "… that believing a proposition should be considered a temporally genuine property relative to a time. And so it seems to me that when God believes a proposition at that time, He has a temporally genuine property (of so believing) at that time" (2016: 68).

On the basis of these reflections Fischer develops the following embellished principle about the fixity of the past:

(FP-2) "For any action $X$, agent $S$, and time $T$, $S$ can perform $X$ at $T$ only if there is a possible world with the same 'hard' past up to $T$ as the actual world in which $S$ does $X$ at $T$" (2016: 126, 186).[7]

As before, we may also formulate a variant that eliminates possible-worlds talk:

(FP-2*) An agent $S$ has it in his power at $T$ to do $X$ (or to refrain from doing $X$) at $T$ only if it is possible at $T$ that: a past obtains that is identical to the actual hard past relative to $T$ and $S$ does $X$ (or refrains from doing $X$) at $T$.

It will be evident by now how Arguments A and B fare if we employ (FP-2*) instead of (FP-1*). With (FP-2*), (4) and (4*) cannot, respectively, be derived from (3) and (3*), since the latter do not specify that the states of affairs de-

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7    The 'hard past' relative to a given time $T$ may be construed, roughly, as the conjunction of all hard facts about the times prior to $T$.

scribed by (1) and (1\*) are *hard* facts about $T_1$. In order to render the two arguments valid, (3) and (3\*) must be substituted with

    ($3_{hard}$)   The state of affairs expressed by (1) belongs to the actual hard past.

    ($3^*_{hard}$)  The state of affairs expressed by (1\*) belongs to the actual hard past.

Let us call the arguments obtained by using (FP-2\*) and ($3_{hard}$) and ($3^*_{hard}$) 'Argument $A_{hard}$' and 'Argument $B_{hard}$', respectively. Both arguments are valid. However, Fischer argues that ($3_{hard}$) is true, but that ($3^*_{hard}$) is false. Generally speaking, (the occurrence of) God's belief that *P* counts as a hard fact whereas the mere fact that *P* is true (but not believed) is not a hard fact. Consequently, Fischer maintains that Argument $B_{hard}$ does not establish logical fatalism but that Argument $A_{hard}$ is sound. What are we to say of this reasoning?

## 4. WHY DOES THEISM TURN SOFT FACTS INTO HARD ONES?

The discussion thus far puts me in a position to expose a puzzle or some hidden costs of Fischer's account, as well as threads that his account, in order to be viable, must tie together. Note that it follows from Fischer's assumptions that premise (1) in arguments A and $A_{hard}$ (God believed '*S* will do *X* at $T_2$' at $T_1$) entails premise (1\*) in arguments B and $B_{hard}$ ('*S* will do *X* at $T_2$' was true at $T_1$). Indeed, if there is an omniscient God, then (1) and (1\*) are necessarily equivalent. How, then, could (1) be hard and fixed while (1\*) is soft and open? If (1) is hard, then, so it is seems, (1\*) is hard as well.[8] However, as we have seen, Fischer rejects arguments concerning *logical* fatalism by maintaining that (1\*) is *soft*. So his account commits him to the claim that what is intrinsically the very same fact — its being true at $T_1$ that *S* will do *X* at $T_2$ — is soft in non-theistic worlds, but hard in theistic worlds. It also follows that Fischer must accept our complete Argument $B_{hard}$ — obtained from Argument B by substituting principle (FP-1\*) with (FP-2\*) and (3\*) with ($3^*_{hard}$) — as part of a sound argument in theistic worlds, but as unsound in non-theistic worlds. This is puzzling, and Fischer owes us an explanation (which I do not think his writings on the topic have yet provided).

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8    This claim relies on the idea that hardness is closed under entailment, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Given Fischer's general approach, it is not open to him to deny that future contingents can be true. (Were he to deny this, he could not maintain that soft facts exist in the first place.) One option for Fischer that springs to mind, however, is to develop a theory of grounding that could explain why theism turns (1*) from a soft fact into a hard one.[9] Perhaps one move would be to adopt the idea that 'truth supervenes on being' and to argue as follows: In theistic worlds the truth at $T_1$ of the proposition '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' is grounded in God's infallible belief at $T_1$ that $S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$. This belief turns that proposition into a hard fact because the fact that this belief occurs is itself hard. In nontheistic worlds, by contrast, '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' is soft because *at* $T_1$ there simply is no event or 'fact on the ground' that would ground the truth of this proposition.

However, if truth supervenes on being, there must be *something* that grounds the truth of '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' at $T_1$. A natural suggestion is that this something is some event that occurs at $T_2$; and the candidate, of course, is $S$'s doing $X$ at $T_2$. Note, however, that in the context of a truth-supervenes-on-being-account this event can only fulfil a grounding role if $T_2$, with all its facts and events, already *exists* at $T_1$. And in that case, it seems to me, it is no longer clear why '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' should be a soft fact that is still open at $T_1$.

Another way to account for the softness of future contingents in non-theistic worlds may be to adopt Geachianism, maintaining that in such worlds we can 'prevent the future' (see Todd 2011) — a possibility that, it may be argued, does not arise in theistic worlds. In non-theistic worlds the truth at $T_1$ of, e. g., '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_{10}$' does not compromise $S$'s power to abstain from $X$-ing at $T_{10}$ because between $T_1$ and $T_{10}$ $S$ can still act in a way that falsifies '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_{10}$'. The task would then be to explain why in theistic worlds, but not in non-theistic ones, $S$ lacks the power to render this proposition false between $T_1$ and $T_{10}$, even though it was true at $T_1$. The explanation would have to draw on the fact that, for both theological and general metaphysical reasons, God's beliefs cannot change over time. But why should a mere divine *belief* at $T_1$ to the effect that $S$ will do $X$ at $T_{10}$ prevent $S$ from acting in ways that would allow $S$ to abstain from $X$-ing at $T_{10}$, whereas the prior truth of '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_{10}$' does not prevent this? We thus arrive at a deeper question about the

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9    Thanks to Alastair Wilson and Robin Le Poidevin for alerting me to the relevance of grounding in this context.

Fischer-Pike argument. What is it that grounds, in some technical sense of 'grounding', the occurrence of infallible divine beliefs about the future?

A classical answer, put forth, e. g., by Scotus, is that the ultimate ground for infallible divine beliefs is the divine will. God, so the idea, infallibly and exhaustively believes what is going to happen because He wills that it will happen, and because He knows His own will and knows that this will and the corresponding decrees are necessarily effective. A plausible picture, then, from the viewpoint of Fischer's theological incompatibilism, might be that it is ultimately the divine will that prevents humans from doing otherwise. The task for the theological incompatibilist then becomes to explain exactly why this would be the case. One explanation would be that, in order to ensure that His will is effective, God creates a causally deterministic world. Note that this approach would have the following interesting feature: By driving a wedge between theological and logical determinism, it ends up claiming a conceptual connection between theological and causal determinism. In my view, the most promising rival, theologically compatibilist, theory — a theory that explains (i) how everything that actually happens is subject to God's will yet (ii) how libertarian human freedom is *not* undermined — is Molinism.[10]

## 5. HARDNESS CLOSURE

The reflections in the previous section were based on the assumption that, given that (1) entails (1\*), if (1) is hard, then (1\*) is also hard. Is this assumption tenable? If not, my argument for the critical asymmetry that (given that $S$ does $X$ at $T_2$) the truth of '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' at $T_1$ is a soft fact in non-theistic worlds but a hard fact in theistic worlds could be rejected and Fischer could maintain that in both kinds of world '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' is a soft fact. In other words, one option for blocking the Ockhamist way out of theological incompatibilism without conceding that truths about future human actions are soft in non-theistic but hard in theistic worlds is to deny that the set of hard facts is closed under entailment. Could Fischer coherently deny hardness closure?

As we have seen, he says that hard facts about a time $T$ are "genuinely about $T$ and not even implicitly about times after $T$", whereas soft facts about $T$ "are also in some genuine sense about times after $T$" (2016: 12). Hard facts,

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10   See Jäger (2011), (2013).

however, entail necessary truths (for example logical or conceptual truths). Since such truths are not about any times at all, it may be argued, they do not qualify as hard facts. Indeed, Fischer himself explicitly argues along such lines when he says in one passage that "hardness does not seem to be closed under entailment" because, "for instance, 'Smith sits at $T_1$' entails '2+2=4,' and yet the latter fact might not properly be considered a hard fact about $T_1$" (1989b: 45). It seems, therefore, that there are clear counterexamples to the claim that hardness is closed under entailment.

However, what is at issue in Argument A is a contingent consequent (namely that '$S$ will do $X$ at $T_2$' is true at $T_1$), and if we restrict the consequents to contingent facts or propositions, it seems that hardness *is* closed under entailment. Consider ordinary examples, e. g., (what we will assume is) the fact that Caesar crossed the Rubicon on January 10, 49 B.C. This is a hard fact about that time. It entails a number of other contingent facts, including, that Caesar existed on January 10, 49 B.C.; that the Rubicon existed on January 10, 49 B.C.; that Caesar changed his location on January 10, 49 B.C.; etc. And there is no doubt that these other facts are now hard as well and fully accomplished. Examples of this kind could be multiplied *ad libitum*.

It must be conceded, however, that there are trickier cases, some of which play a central role in Fischer's discussion of hardness and softness. Consider two propositions that he discusses in various places to argue against the idea that softness can be characterized simply in terms of 'entailing facts about the future':

(A) Socrates is sitting at $T_1$.

(B) It is not the case that Socrates sits for the first time at $T_2$.[11]

Fischer argues that (B) is a fact about the future, relative to $T_1$, and that (A), although being a hard fact, entails (B). Hence an unrefined entailment criterion appears to be unsuitable to delineate softness. Many facts that are clearly hard entail facts such as (B), says Fischer. Does not this argument also show that hardness fails to be closed under entailment?[12] To answer this question let us look more closely at (B). The most natural way to understand it, it seems, is as follows:

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11   Cf., e. g., Fischer (2016: 131, 153; 1983: 92; 1986: 593; 1989b: 35-36).
12   Thanks to John Fischer for alerting me to this question (personal correspondence).

(B\*)    There is a time $T_2$ (later than $T_1$) at which Socrates is sitting, and he has been sitting at some time prior to $T_2$.

According to certain characterizations of softness that Fischer considers sympathetically — namely that soft facts are 'temporally relational' or about past times 'extrinsically considered' — (B\*) may be classified as soft since its second conjunct is soft (although even this is not quite clear). In any case, (A) does not entail (B\*). The clearest reason for this is that (A) does not entail the first conjunct of (B\*). The fact that Socrates is sitting at $T_1$ does not entail that he is, or will be, sitting at $T_2$; it does not even entail that some later time $T_2$ exists. So this alleged counterexample to hardness closure fails. I conclude that on Fischer's account of hardness and softness it is difficult to see how hardness would not be closed under entailment, provided that (as is legitimate in this context) we limit the consequents of the relevant entailment relations to contingent facts.

Here is one final point. Fischer is (rightly) eager to distinguish two questions that are sometimes conflated: whether a fact is (i) genuinely or 'intrinsically' about the past, and whether it is (ii) fixed or beyond anyone's control, i. e., whether no one has a choice about it. In the preceding paragraphs we have been looking at (i). Yet what we are ultimately interested in in the present context is (ii). The question is whether divine beliefs about future human actions depend on those human actions, and whether these beliefs are, in some appropriate sense, under our control if our actions are under our control. And however complicated it may be directly to establish the closure of hardness if we construe it in terms of temporal non-relationality, it seems clear that *fixity* is closed under entailment. If no one has control over, or a choice about p, and p entails q, then no one has control over, or a choice about q. Fischer himself states in one passage that "fixity is plausibly taken to be closed under entailment" (1989b: 45). If so, he owes us an explanation as to why certain facts about the future that are intrinsically the same in theistic and in non-theistic worlds should be soft and open in non-theistic worlds but fixed in theistic ones.

What's *really* hard about the genuine past, I should like to say, is not its temporal non-relationality but the fact that it is over-and-done-with once and forever. The comforting side is that years that have passed as good ones won't come back as bad ones.[13]

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# FISCHER AND THE FIXITY OF THE PAST

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This excellent collection, *Our Fate: Essays on God and Free Will,* brings together eleven of John Martin Fischer's previously published papers, together with a fascinating 50-page introductory essay in which Fischer not only summarizes and elaborates the content of the papers, but also develops further important arguments concerning divine foreknowledge and human freedom and moral responsibility. As well as being a major contribution to the philosophy of religion, its interest and importance extends well beyond that sphere, notably to issues concerning the compatibility of free will and causal determinism, the asymmetry between past and future, the evaluation of counterfactuals, varieties of dependence, and the nature of knowledge. In this short essay, my focus will, however, be limited to one of the book's major themes: the fixity of the past.

In a series of papers, many of them included in *Our Fate* (OF)[1], and in his book *The Metaphysics of Free Will* (1994), Fischer has discussed, elaborated, and defended a principle that he calls 'The Fixity of the Past' (henceforth 'Fixity Principle'). The guiding idea of this principle is that our freedom is restricted to the freedom to *add* to the given past; alternatively, that anything that we *can* do is a possible extension of the actual past.[2]

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[1]    To refer to the papers in this collection, I shall use a (sometimes abbreviated) title of the paper, followed by the relevant page or pages of the version reprinted in OF. Bibliographical details of the papers can be found in the list of References at the end of this article. I refer to Fischer's introductory essay as 'Introduction'.

[2]    In order to avoid irrelevant objections, the Fixity Principle should probably be formulated in a way that restricts it to so-called 'hard' facts about the past. (See, for example, OF, pp. 120, 126, 186, 199.) Unfortunately, I do not have space to discuss Fischer's very important argu-

If the Fixity Principle is true, it rules out any view according to which we may have the ability to do otherwise even if our doing otherwise would require a different past from the actual past. Not all versions of compatibilism are committed to this claim. Nevertheless, the varieties that are relevant to Fischer's Fixity Principle include not only versions of compatibilism concerning human freedom and divine foreknowledge (the principal topic of *Our Fate*), but also versions of compatibilism concerning freedom and causal determinism. These might collectively be called versions of 'altered-past compatibilism', using this term in a sense that is broader than its standard usage.[3]

## 2. THE FIXITY PRINCIPLE: DISPENSING WITH TRANSFER PRINCIPLES

One of Fischer's principal contentions is that although some incompatibilist arguments that are driven by the idea of the fixity of the past rely on what are known as 'transfer principles' (of which I shall say more shortly), 'we can give versions of the argument for incompatibilism that do not rely explicitly or implicitly on *any* transfer principle' ('Introduction', 5). According to Fischer, a 'fixity' argument for incompatibilism can avoid this reliance by employing, as a *premise* in the argument, a version of the Fixity Principle such as the 'conditional' version or the 'possible-worlds' version to be discussed in §§3–4 below. (See, for example, 'Introduction', 5–6.)

I find Fischer's attitude to the role of transfer principles puzzling, however. For it seems to ignore the fact that — however controversial they may be — transfer principles play a crucial role in a type of argument *for* the Fixity Principle.

On the face of it, incompatibilist proponents of Fischer's Fixity Principle face a dialectical problem. For it appears that the compatibilist (at least what I

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ments that the restriction to 'hard' facts does not vindicate an Ockhamist version of compatibilism about divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

3    In particular, David Lewis's 'local-miracle compatibilism', as it is standardly called, is a version of 'altered-past compatibilism' in my sense. This is because his local-miracle compatibilism involves the claim that, under determinism, the relevant worlds in which I act otherwise are worlds that involve a difference in the past *immediately* before my action, even though they do not involve a difference in the *remote* past before my action (Lewis 1981). Fischer's Fixity Principle, however, makes no discrimination between the remote past and the immediate past (cf. Mackie 2003, §6). The term 'altered-past compatibilism' is taken from Horgan 1985, who uses it in a narrower sense, one that excludes Lewis's 'local-miracle compatibilism'.

am calling the altered-past compatibilist; I'll take this qualification for granted in what follows) will simply deny the Fixity Principle. There is, therefore, a danger of what Fischer has called a 'dialectical stalemate' (1994, 84), with incompatibilists simply insisting that the past puts a limitation on our abilities that is repudiated by the compatibilist.

One attempt to break this stalemate (as I see it) seeks to derive the Fixity Principle from a combination of two claims: one concerning our lack of 'direct' power over the past (a claim that, on the face of it, is less controversial than the Fixity Principle), and the other a 'Transfer Principle' to the effect that our lack of direct power over the past is 'transferred' to a lack of power over anything that would *require* a difference to the past.

One such argument employs a 'Transfer Principle' quoted by Fischer: 'if an agent has it in his power to bring it about that $p$, and if $p$ entails $q$, then the agent has it in his power to bring it about that $q$' (OF, 117, 166). When combined with the principle that no agent has it in his power to bring it about that $q$ where $q$ is the negation of a true proposition stating that some past state of affairs obtained, this Transfer Principle delivers the conclusion that if an agent's doing $Y$ at $t$ is *inconsistent* with the truths about the past relative to $t$, the agent does not have it in his power to do $Y$ at $t$. And this conclusion is a version of Fischer's Fixity Principle.

This 'transfer argument' for the Fixity Principle — which space does not permit me to spell out in detail here — is highly contentious.[4] But when Fischer appears to imply that, in the face of objections to the argument, incompatibilists may simply help themselves to the argument's conclusion (the Fixity Principle) without attempting to derive it from other premises (e.g., 'Scotism', 60, 65; 'Introduction', 5), this looks suspiciously like an attempt to gain the advantages of theft over honest toil.[5]

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4    The 'transfer argument' that I have outlined here has obvious affinities with versions of the Consequence Argument (for the incompatibility of free will and causal determinism) that rely on a combination of a claim about our lack of power over the past and laws of nature with the claim (arrived at *via* an application of a Transfer Principle) that we lack power over anything that is *entailed by* the combination of the past and laws of nature. For more on the comparison, see Mackie 2003. See also Fischer, 'Scotism', and Fischer 1994, Chs 1–3.

5    Fischer does not appear to regard the appeal to the Transfer Principle as a strategy (even a failed strategy) for *arguing* for the principle of the Fixity of the Past. Instead, when Fischer discusses incompatibilist arguments that employ the Transfer Principle, he treats them as *relying on* (rather than attempting to support) the Fixity Principle. (See 'Introduction', 2–5; 'Scotism',

As we shall see, though (§4 below), Fischer does, in some of his writings, give an alternative positive argument for a version of the Fixity Principle, thus providing, in effect, a response to my complaint.

## 3. THE FIXITY PRINCIPLE: BEYOND THE CONDITIONAL FORMULATION

When arguing for the dispensability of transfer principles to the incompatibilist's argument, Fischer's initial proposal was that the incompatibilist may appeal directly to a 'conditional' version of the Fixity Principle, represented by the following:

(FP)    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*. ('Introduction', 5)[6]

(FP) is, however, notoriously vulnerable to objections based on alleged counterexamples involving backtracking counterfactuals.[7] One of the most interesting features of Fischer's treatment of the Fixity of the Past is his response to these objections.

Fischer presents, as a typical instance of an apparent counterexample to (FP), the case of the Salty Old Seadog:

The salty old seadog always checks the weather at 9:00 am … He calls the weather service. If they tell him the weather will be fair at noon, he always goes sailing at noon. And if they tell him the weather won't be fair at noon, he never goes sailing at noon. This is his stable, reliable mindset and disposition with regard to sailing …

We make no assumptions about the existence of God or causal determinism … It is just prior to noon, and this morning the seadog was told that the weather would be horrible at noon. He is his usual self, and he decides not to go sailing at noon. But *can* he nevertheless go sailing at noon? It seems that

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he has it in his power to do so; after all, he is not coerced, manipulated electronically, hypnotized, and so forth, and we are not assuming the existence of an omniscient God, or that causal determinism obtains. So some would insist that the seadog *can* go sailing at noon.

Now it also seems that the following backtracking conditional is true in the example:

[(B1)] If the seadog were to go sailing at noon, then the weatherman would have told him at 9:00 am that the weather would be fair at noon.

But if so, then we have a counterexample to (FP). ('Introduction', 10, but with Fischer's conditional (C1) relabelled as '(B1)' ('B' for 'backtracker'). Cf. 'Power over the Past', 103–104.)

As Fischer notes, the incompatibilist could attempt to resist the alleged counterexample to (FP) (11). However, Fischer argues that the incompatibilist *need* not do so. The incompatibilist can concede, at least for the sake of argument, that this example does refute the 'conditional' version of the Fixity Principle ((FP)). No matter, for the example does not refute a different, 'possible-worlds' formulation of the Fixity Principle, namely (FP*):

(FP*)  An agent $S$ has it in his power at (or just prior to) $T$ in possible world $w$ to do $X$ at $T$ 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 $T$. ('Introduction', 6, 11)[8]

Why so? Because the proponent of (FP*) can insist that, if the 'can-claim' *is* true in the case of the Salty Old Seadog, this is because there is some possible world (a 'past-matching possible world') that is in accord with (FP*). This would, of course, have to be a world in which the seadog acts out of character—one in which, in spite of the warning at 9:00 am of foul weather, he nevertheless breaks the habit of a lifetime and decides to go sailing. However, it appears to be consistent with this to claim that the *closest* possible worlds in which the seadog goes sailing at noon are ones in which he does *not* act out of character, but instead acts in accord with his settled dispositions, against the background of a different past. And if the closest possible worlds are of this type, the backtracking counterfactual (B1) will be *true*, according to a widely accepted account of the truth-conditions of counterfactuals (11).

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8    Again, similar formulations of Fischer's 'possible-worlds' version of the Fixity Principle can be found in many papers in OF, as well as in Fischer 1994. See also note 2 above.

Fischer's ingenious argument thus appears to allow the (incompatibilist) proponent of the Fixity of the Past principle to sidestep the 'backtracking' problems to which the conditional version of the principle is vulnerable.

Even if Fischer is right about this, this move on the part of the incompatibilist from (FP) to (FP*) is, so far, merely a defensive one.[9] Fischer argues, however, that the incompatibilist can go further. Building on examples such as that of the Salty Old Seadog, Fischer maintains that there is a positive argument for the Fixity of the Past principle, in the form of (FP*), based on considerations of practical rationality.

Before considering this further argument, though, we can note an interesting question raised by Fischer's Seadog example. It is granted, by incompatibilist and compatibilist alike, that the relevant 'can' claim is true, and hence that the seadog has, in the actual world, the ability to go sailing at noon. It is also granted, by incompatibilist and compatibilist alike, that there is a possible world corresponding to the backtracking counterfactual (B1) — call it the 'B-world', in which the seadog goes sailing at noon.[10] The question is: when, in the B-world (the world with a different past from that of the actual world), the seadog goes sailing, is he, in the B-world, *exercising* the ability to go sailing at noon that he actually has? As far as I am aware, Fischer does not explicitly address this question. However, I believe (although I cannot argue fully for this here) that the answer of Fischer's incompatibilist should be 'No'. For one thing, if, in going sailing in the B-world, the seadog *were* exercising an ability to go sailing at noon that he actually has, it would seem strange to regard the seadog's action in the B-world as irrelevant to the 'can-claim' concerning that ability, as the incompatibilist is committed to doing. It appears, then, that we have the following result. Both compatibilist and incompatibilist agree that the seadog actually *has* (at or just before noon) the ability to go sailing at noon, even though he does not actually exercise that ability. Both compatibilist and incompatibilist agree that the B-world is a possible world in which the seadog goes sailing at noon. But whereas the compatibilist thinks that the seadog's action in the B-world is (or at least may be) an *exercise* of

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9    As Fischer himself emphasizes: e.g., in 'Power over the Past', 113.

10   Of course, if there is one B-world, there will be many. But for simplicity I'll ignore that fact, and speak of 'the B-world'.

his actual ability to go sailing at noon, the incompatibilist denies this. I shall return to this point in the next section.

## 4. PRACTICAL REASONING AND THE FIXITY OF THE PAST

If the incompatibilist simply insists, without argument, on the truth of the Fixity Principle (FP*), this may be regarded as, if not begging the question, then at least dialectically impotent in the debate against the compatibilist. In effect, the problem of the 'dialectical stalemate' mentioned in §2 above threatens to recur. However, Fischer claims that this situation can be remedied:

> it is at least plausible that rejecting (FP*) would lead to unacceptable consequences for practical reasoning. Thus there is a plausibility argument for accepting (FP*) … that does not depend on a prior acceptance of incompatibilism. ('Introduction', 18)

Fischer's 'practical rationality' argument appeals to cases with the same structure as that of the Salty Old Seadog. He employs an example taken from *The Metaphysics of Free Will*:

> Consider the example of the Icy Patch. Sam saw a boy slip and fall on an icy patch on Sam's sidewalk on Monday. The boy was seriously injured, and this disturbed Sam deeply. On Tuesday, Sam must decide whether to go ice-skating. Suppose that Sam's character is such that if he were to decide to go ice-skating at noon on Tuesday, then the boy would not have slipped and hurt himself on Monday. ('Introduction', 18, quoting Fischer 1994, 95)

We fill out the example so as to make it plausible that, according to both incompatibilist and compatibilist, Sam is able to decide to go, and to go, ice-skating on Tuesday.[11] And — as in the case of the Seadog — we can assume that both incompatibilist and compatibilist accept the truth of the relevant backtracking conditional. Yet — and this is the crucial point — it would clearly be irrational for Sam to take into account, when making up his mind whether to go skating on Tuesday, the truth of this backtracking conditional — that is, the fact that, if he *were* to decide to go skating, the terrible accident would not

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11    According to the incompatibilist, who accepts (FP*) (but not, of course, the compatibilist), the truth of the relevant 'can-claim' requires that there be a 'past-matching' world in which Sam knows on Tuesday of the accident on Monday, and yet acts out of character and decides to go skating in spite of this.

have occurred on Monday. And this, Fischer claims, is an embarrassment to the compatibilist, who rejects (FP\*). To quote at length from Fischer:

> If we accept (FP\*), we can say what we *should* say about practical reasoning in a case such as Icy Patch. Intuitively, what Sam can do on Tuesday is to add to the given past (in which the terrible accident did indeed take place on Monday). So any reasons flowing from the non-occurrence of the accident on Monday are just irrelevant to Sam. But how exactly can one embrace this obvious point, if one rejects (FP\*)? … Having abandoned (FP\*), why isn't Icy Patch an example in which Sam **has access** on Tuesday to a possible world in which the accident didn't happen on Monday? More specifically, given a rejection of (FP\*), why can't Sam **bring it about** on Tuesday — simply by deciding to go ice-skating — that the world did not contain the accident on Monday? ('Introduction', 19; bold emphasis mine)

> Given a rejection of (FP\*), nothing rules it out that in Icy Patch, Sam **has access** on Tuesday to a possible world in which the accident did not occur on Monday… But if this is so, why shouldn't Sam take this as a reason to decide to go ice-skating on Tuesday? If it is appropriate for Sam to take as relevant reasons that obtain in any world **genuinely accessible to him at a time**, then surely [if (FP\*) is rejected] it is (or may well be) rational for him to decide to go ice-skating on Tuesday. But … this is a manifestly unacceptable result … ('Introduction', 20–21; bold emphasis mine)

Fischer's argument is as follows. Although both incompatibilist and compatibilist regard the 'B-world' of this example (a world in which Sam decides on Tuesday to go skating, and there is no previous accident on Monday) as possible, the incompatibilist regards it as 'inaccessible' to the deliberator, whereas the compatibilist (who denies (FP\*)) seems committed to regarding it as 'accessible' to the deliberator. Given the principle (call it 'the Accessibility Principle') that it is appropriate to take into account, in one's practical reasoning, reasons that obtain in any world that is 'accessible' (see the second quotation above), the compatibilist is in an embarrassing position, since it is manifestly *inappropriate* for the deliberator (Sam) to take the reasons that obtain in the B-world into account.

Fischer's 'practical rationality' argument for (FP\*) rests on two crucial claims. One is the Accessibility Principle. The other is that the compatibilist is committed to accepting (or at least has no good reason to deny) that the B-world is 'accessible' to the deliberator, even though the B-world has a different past from the actual world.

I shall now challenge this combination of claims. I shall argue that either it is reasonable for the compatibilist to regard the B-world as *inaccessible* to the deliberator, or Fischer's Accessibility Principle is cast into doubt.

Fischer does not, as far as I am aware, explain exactly what it means to say that a world (or scenario) is 'accessible' (in the relevant sense) to an agent. He does suggest, though, that if a world is 'accessible' to an agent (in the relevant sense), then the agent can *bring it about* that the world obtains (or is actual). (See the first quotation above.) Put in these terms, Fischer's claim is that whereas the incompatibilist denies that the agent can bring it about that the B-world obtains, the compatibilist is committed to asserting (or at least has no obvious reason to deny) that the agent *can* bring it about that the B-world obtains.

But how is Fischer to justify this claim about the compatibilist? One argument for this claim would appeal to the following 'Transfer (of Power) Principle':

(T) If $S$ can bring it about that $p$, and if it were the case that $p$, it would be the case that $q$, then $S$ can bring it about that $q$.

Given (T), one could argue as follows, using two premises ((1) and (2)) that the compatibilist accepts:

(1) Sam can (on Tuesday) bring it about that he decides (on Tuesday) to go ice-skating.

(2) If Sam were to decide (on Tuesday) to go ice-skating, the terrible accident would not have occurred on Monday.

Therefore:

(3) Sam can bring it about that the terrible accident did not occur on Monday.

Obviously, however, Fischer cannot appeal to this argument. For Fischer's *incompatibilist* must deny that this argument is valid, since he accepts its premises but denies its conclusion.

By the same token, Fischer's incompatibilist is committed to rejecting the Transfer Principle (T). But if (T) can be rejected by the incompatibilist, why should the *compatibilist* be committed to it? Moreover, as we have seen (§2 above), Fischer has committed himself to the project of defending incompatibilism *without* appeal to Transfer Principles. It would therefore be inconsist-

ent for him to appeal, in his argument for (FP*), to versions of the Transfer Principle (including (T)).

A more promising strategy, however, (for arguing that the compatibilist should treat the B-world as 'accessible') is for Fischer to characterize the 'accessibility' of a possible world in terms of the exercise of the agent's abilities, along the following lines:

Where an agent $S$ is deliberating about whether to do $Y$, and where $S$ can do $Y$, *any* possible world (or scenario) in which the agent *exercises her ability to do $Y$* (the ability corresponding to the 'can-claim') is, in the relevant sense, '*accessible*' to the agent.

It does seem that, in this sense of 'accessible', the compatibilist should say that the B-world, in which the accident did not occur on Monday, is accessible to Sam as he deliberates on Tuesday about whether to go skating, although the incompatibilist should not. For according to my argument in §3 above, it seems that while both incompatibilist and compatibilist agree that the B-world is possible, and that it is a world in which Sam does something that he actually has the ability to do, the compatibilist should hold that the B-world is one in which Sam *exercises* this ability, whereas the incompatibilist should not.

So far, so good. The trouble is, however, that if accessibility is characterized in these terms, Fischer's Accessibility Principle becomes suspect.[12] For suppose that some possible world in which the agent $S$ exercises her ability to do $Y$ is a world of which $S$ can be rationally certain that it *will* not be actual (and will not be actual even if she does do $Y$). Fischer's Accessibility Principle, as we are now interpreting it, tells $S$ that she should nevertheless take, as relevant to her actual decision whether to do $Y$, the reasons that obtain in that world. But in that case, the Accessibility Principle clearly gives the *wrong* answer. How could rationality require $S$ to take into account, in deciding whether to do $Y$, a world that she can be certain will not be actual even if she does $Y$? Yet that is exactly what the Accessibility Principle dictates.

Moreover, this is, of course, precisely the situation in which Sam (or at least an appropriately knowledgeable Sam) finds himself in the example of Icy Patch, according to the compatibilist's construal of the example. Sam is

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12   My challenge to Fischer's Accessibility Principle is distinct from two others: an appeal to causal decision theory, and André Gallois' (2009) principle of the fixity of reasons. Although Fischer recognizes both of these challenges, he complains that they seem '*ad hoc*' (See Fischer 1994, 102–104, and Fischer and Pendergraft 2013, §4).

deliberating, on Tuesday, whether to go skating on Tuesday. He has (and believes that he has) the ability to go skating on Tuesday. (Let us refer to this as 'the ability to go skatingT'.) He believes that there is a possible world, the B-world, in which he goes skating on Tuesday, but there is no terrible accident on Monday. Moreover (if Sam is a compatibilist), Sam believes that the B-world is one in which he *exercises* his ability to go skatingT. Nevertheless, Sam can be rationally certain, on Tuesday, that the B-world *will* not be actual (and will not be actual even if he exercises his ability to go skatingT). For (whether he is a compatibilist or an incompatibilist) he knows that whatever he *can* do, anything that he *will* do will be an extension of the actual past. And the actual past on Tuesday includes, as he is aware, the accident on Monday. Given all this, Sam would obviously be crazy to take the fact that the accident does not occur on Monday in the B-world, plus the fact that the B-world is one in which he exercises his ability to go skatingT, as a reason for going skating on Tuesday. So he would obviously be crazy to follow the Accessibility Principle!

Now, of course, the incompatibilist will presumably say that, since Sam can be rationally certain that the B-world *will* not be actual, he should *not* regard it as a world in which he *exercises* his ability to go skatingT, and hence should *not* regard it as a world that satisfies the definition of 'accessible' that is relevant to the Accessibility Principle. According to the incompatibilist, there is nothing wrong with the Accessibility Principle; rather, the problem is with the compatibilist's view about which worlds are those in which Sam exercises his ability, and thus about which worlds satisfy the Principle's definition of 'accessibility'. But to insist on this, in the context of the current debate, would be to beg the question against the compatibilist.

If I am right, Fischer's 'practical rationality' argument does not, after all, succeed in breaking a dialectical stalemate over the acceptability of the incompatibilist's Fixity Principle (FP*). Nevertheless, this does not undermine the importance of Fischer's ingenious and provocative discussion of these issues.[13]

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# FISCHER ON FOREKNOWLEDGE AND EXPLANATORY DEPENDENCE

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**Abstract.** I explore several issues raised in John Martin Fischer's *Our Fate: Essays on God and Free Will*. First I discuss whether an approach to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge that appeals directly to the claim that God's beliefs depend on the future is importantly different from Ockhamism. I suggest that this dependence approach has advantages over Ockhamism. I also argue that this approach gives us good reason to reject the claim that the past is fixed. Finally, I discuss Fischer's proposal regarding God's knowledge of future contingents. I suggest that it may be able to secure comprehensive foreknowledge.

John Martin Fischer has been providing groundbreaking contributions to the literature on freedom and foreknowledge for over 30 years. I have learned a great deal from the essays contained in *Our Fate* and it's exciting to see them all collected in one volume!

## 1. OCKHAMISM AND EXPLANATORY DEPENDENCE

The traditional Ockhamist defense of *foreknowledge compatibilism* (the view that comprehensive divine foreknowledge is compatible with the ability to do otherwise) involves distinguishing between 'hard' and 'soft' facts about the past. Hard facts about a time are supposed to be, in some sense, temporally non-relational, intrinsic facts about that time, while soft facts about a time are also about some future time. For example:

Hard fact: Kennedy was shot

Soft fact: Kennedy was shot 53 years before I wrote this paper

Ockhamists claim that God's beliefs about the past are soft and thus need not be held fixed when evaluating what an agent can do. Thus God's past belief that you will do A is not held fixed when evaluating whether you can avoid doing A. My preferred defense of *foreknowledge compatibilism* eschews any appeal to the distinction between hard and soft facts. Rather I appeal directly to the claim that God's beliefs explanatorily depend on future free choices. I'll call this approach the Dependence Solution.

Ockhamists normally endorse this principle:

Fixity of the Hard Past (FHP): An agent S can (at time t in world w) do X at t only if there is a possible world w* with the same "hard" past up to t in which S does X at t. (See Swenson 2016)

The debate then hinges on whether God's beliefs count as "hard" facts about the past. As I've developed it, the Dependence Solution instead takes the past to be fixed only in the sense captured by this principle:

Fixity of the Independent Past (FIP): An agent S can (at time t in world w) do X at t only if there is a possible world w* in which all of the facts in w up to t which do not explanatorily depend on S's choice(s) at t hold and S does X at t.

On this approach, so long as God's beliefs depend on our future free choices, we can avoid arguments for *foreknowledge incompatibilism* that depend on the claim that the past is fixed.

At points Fischer appears to be skeptical that moving away from Ockhamism and endorsing something like the Dependence Solution really breaks much new ground. In their discussion of Trenton Merricks' defense of the Dependence Solution (or something quite like it), Fischer and Patrick Todd express this sort of concern:

It is best to think of Ockhamism as involving two distinct "steps." The first step is to give an account of why the past relation-ally or extrinsically considered need not be held fixed... this account crucially involves the notion of dependence; soft facts about the past need not be fixed for us precisely because they sometimes depend (in a particular way) on what we do. The second step—the step that receives nearly all of the attention—is to contend that God's past beliefs in fact do not belong to the intrinsic past, but instead are "soft facts" about the past. This second step makes sense only against the (often unstated) background of the first. So we object when Merricks writes that "when it comes to divine foreknowledge's compatibility with hu-

man freedom, the fundamental question is not the Ockhamist's question of whether God's beliefs about what an agent will do in the future are 'hard facts.' Rather, the fundamental question is whether God's beliefs about what an agent will do in the future depend on what that agent will do in the future." But our point is that the issue of dependence and the issue of hardness are intertwined. So Merricks's claim is a bit like saying, "The fundamental question is not whether God's beliefs depend (in particular way) on what happens in the future (such as the actions of human agents). Rather, the fundamental question is whether God's beliefs about what an agent will do in the future depend on what that agent will do in the future." (*Our Fate*, 207)

The worry seems to be that Ockhamists were already concerned with dependence (as well as temporal relationality), so the Dependence Solution isn't really breaking new ground. I think there is something right about this thought. Ockhamists are concerned with both *dependence* and *temporal relationality*. Ockhamists think that the temporally relational past need not be held fixed because it *uniquely* depends on the future, in a way that the hard past does not.

In my view, by replacing the dual focus on dependence and temporal relationality with a single minded focus on dependence, we can secure freedom in cases where Ockhamists would like to but cannot. As a result God will have more providential control on the Dependence Solution than on Ockhamism. These differences reveal that the distinction between the two approaches is significant. I will try to illustrate these points by examining a case in which Fischer has perhaps been willing to grant too much to the Ockhamist.

## 2. THE DEPENDENCE SOLUTION, OCKHAMISM AND PROVIDENTIAL CONTROL.

Consider the following case offered by Alvin Plantinga:

Paul and The Ant Colony: "Let's suppose that a colony of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday. Since this colony hasn't yet had a chance to get properly established, its new home is still a bit fragile. In particular, if the ants were to remain and Paul were to mow his lawn this afternoon, the colony would be destroyed. Although nothing remarkable about these ants is visible to the naked eye, God, for reasons of his own, intends that it be preserved. Now as a matter of fact, Paul will not mow his lawn this afternoon. God, who is essentially omniscient, knew in advance, of course, that Paul will not mow his lawn this afternoon; but if he had foreknown instead that Paul would mow this afternoon, then he would have prevented the ants from moving in." (Plantinga 1986, 254)

Intuitively, this is the sort of case in which, by Ockhamist lights, Paul has the ability to mow. (And indeed Ockhamists have claimed that he does, see Plantinga 1986.) Furthermore, it is providentially advantageous for God if this story is consistent with Paul having the ability to mow his lawn. God would then have the ability to ensure more outcomes while still giving us the ability to do otherwise.

Fischer seems willing to grant (at least for the sake of argument) that the Ockhamist can maintain that there is a world with the same "hard" past in which Paul mows (See *Our Fate* 126-7 and 203-5.). But it is not clear that this is plausible. The conjunction of the following two facts appear to entail that Paul does not mow:

(a) God intended (for reasons independent of Paul) to keep the ants away from all mown lawns.

(b) The ants were in the lawn.

Since there are no worlds where (a) and (b) both hold and Paul mows his lawn, Ockhamists would have to say that either (a) or (b) is a soft fact. But neither are obvious candidates. On its surface (b) looks like a paradigm case of a hard fact. (b), rather than 'Kennedy was shot', could have served as our initial example of a hard fact. The only feature of (b) that makes it look different from 'Kennedy was shot' is that (b) is plausibly explained by Paul's future choice to refrain from mowing. At any rate, Fischer and Todd appear inclined to grant that (b) is an "uncontroversially "hard" fact about the past." (*Our Fate,* 204)

Perhaps things are better with regard to (a). (a) entails (given plausible assumptions about God) a future fact, namely: (c) 'the ants avoid all mown lawns'. And, as Fischer suggests regarding God's decrees (*Our Fate*, 27), it is perhaps somewhat plausible that (c) is a conjunct or constituent of (a). So (a) appears to be temporally relational in some interesting sense.

However, it seems clear to me that (a) is the sort of fact about the past that should be held fixed in determining what agents are able to do. This is because (a) is not explained by any future fact. Rather, if there is an explanatory connection at all, the fact that the ants avoid mown lawns is explained by God's intention that they do. Intuitively, past facts that are not explained by any future fact should be held fixed. As Fischer and Todd put it, "soft facts about the

past need not be fixed for us precisely because they sometimes depend (in a particular way) on what we do." (*Our Fate* 207. See also Todd's (2013) discussion of divine decrees.) Facts that do not depend on any future facts (and thus do not even potentially depend on what we do) are not soft facts.

So the Ockhamist is faced with two facts: (a), which is (arguably) temporally relational but is not explained by future facts, and (b), which may be explained by future facts but is not temporally relational. If the Ockhamist wants to say that Paul has the ability to mow, then it looks like they must say that either dependence (of a sort that does not involve temporal relationality) or temporal relationality (of a sort that does not involve dependence) is sufficient (all by itself) for softness. But this is incompatible with the dual concern for both dependence and temporal relationality which Fischer and Todd correctly attribute to the Ockhamist. So it is not clear that Ockhamism secures the (desirable by Ockhamist lights) result that Paul has the ability to mow.

The best way to respond, I think, is to say that all the business about temporal relationality was beside the point. What matters is dependence. The Dependence Solution allows for the claim that Paul is free to mow his yard. This is because 'the ants were in the yard' is plausibly explained by Paul's choice. Thus it need not be held fixed. Its lacking temporal relationality is neither here nor there.

In addition to securing Paul's freedom to mow, the Dependence Solution has the following advantages: (1) it avoids having to give an account of the distinction between hard and soft facts. (We hold fixed only independent facts, whether hard or soft.) (2) it avoids the worry (raised by Fischer) that, even if God's beliefs are soft facts, they may contain 'hard kernel elements' which ought to be held fixed (See Chapter 7 of *Our Fate*.). (The Dependence solution is not committed to holding fixed these hard elements.) (3) in virtue of securing Paul's freedom to mow, the Dependence Solution secures a greater amount of providential control than does Ockhamism. (This feature will be attractive to at least some theists.)

Note that, if the Dependence Solution is combined with the plausible claim that explanatory circles are impossible, it will still impose significant limits on providential control. God will not be able to use foreknowledge in ways that generate explanatory circles. For example, God will not be able to causally contribute to Jones's being in C because he believes that being in C will cause Jones to freely sit. Since God's belief that Jones will sit depends

on Jones's sitting, God's putting Jones in C for this reason would generate an explanatory circle:

Jones's sitting→God's belief→Jones's being in C→Jones's sitting

Thus the ways in which God could put foreknowledge to use are somewhat curtailed. (See Hunt (1993) and Zimmerman (2012) for helpful discussions of such limitations on the usefulness of foreknowledge.)

## 3. DEPENDENCE AND THE FIXITY OF THE PAST

In addition to worrying that the Dependence Solution doesn't break new ground, Fischer also argues that dependence solution proponents lack good grounds for rejecting principles like FHP. Fischer and Neal Tognazzini press the worry as follows:

> But how exactly does the dependence point in any way vitiate—or even ad-dress—the point about the fixity of the past? That is, if a hard fact about the past is now fixed and out of our con- trol precisely because it is 'over-and-done-with', why is the dependence in question relevant? If fixity stems from over-and-done-with-ness, and over-and-done-with-ness is a function of tem- poral intrinsicality, both of which seem plausible, then it would seem more reasonable to con- clude that even the dependent hard facts are fixed. (*Our Fate*, 231)

I have responded to this worry elsewhere (See Swenson 2016). But since this is perhaps the most important objection Fischer raises to the Dependence Solution, it is worth discussing here. I maintain that if the "hard" past can depend on the future, principles like the *Fixity of the Hard Past* (FHP) should be rejected in favor of the *Fixity of the Independent Past* (FIP). In my view, the intuitions that the past is "fixed" or "over-and-done-with" (in a sense that places it beyond our control) depend on the belief that the past is independ-ent of the future.

Returning to Paul and The Ant Colony, Insofar as I take on board the thought that the ants being in his yard is explained by Paul's decision to re-frain from mowing, I lose the intuition that Paul's options are constrained by the location of the ants. It seems to me that Paul has the option to mow despite the location of the ants. In general, dependent facts have a derivative status which seems incompatible with their constraining one's choices. Cases

in which one comes to accept the possibility of time travel motivate the same point. Elsewhere, I've argued as follows:

> Imagine that you have come to believe that you are sitting in a working time machine. (Set aside the issue of whether time travel is genuinely metaphysically possible.) You believe that the machine is programmed so that, if you push the button in front of you, then you will travel to the year 1492. Furthermore, you believe that the past and the laws entail that you will travel to 1492 if and only if you push the button. Note that, by accepting the possibility of time travel, you have dropped the assumption that the past must be explanatorily independent of the future.

I claim that, once you believe that facts about 1492 depend on your choices, [FHP] would no longer seem intuitive. If you accept [FHP], then you should accept that either you cannot push the button or you cannot refrain from pushing the button. After all, it is either a fact about the past that you appeared in 1492 or it is a fact that you did not. And you believe that there is no world with the same past and laws in which you push the button and do not travel back, or vice versa. (Here, I assume that you accept the fixity of the laws principle.) However, I do not think that this claim about your lack of options would seem true to you. Surely it would seem that you have the option to push the button and the option to refrain from pushing the button. It would not seem that the past was 'over-and-done-with' in any sense inconsistent with your freedom.

This case suggests that [FHP] is intuitive only because we assume that the past is explanatorily independent of future events. If you came to believe that the past depends on your choices, [FHP] would not seem true. Note that the case works even if time travel is impossible. I am relying on your mere belief (in the case) that the past depends on the future to establish that your inclination to accept [FHP] depends on the assumption that the past is explanatorily independent of the future. No assumptions about the possibility of time travel are required. [Swenson 2016, p 664-5.]

So it appears that, so long as it is granted that the past can depend on the future, both time travel cases and cases such as Paul and The Ant Colony motivate rejecting FHP. Thus I do not think Fischer should dismiss the relevance of the claim that the "hard" past depends on the future. Rather, the *foreknowledge incompatibilist* should maintain that the claim is false.

# 4. FISCHER'S BOOTSTRAPPING ACCOUNT
## OF DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

I now turn to Fischer's rather ingenious proposal regarding God's knowledge of future contingents. Although I do not endorse his account, I will suggest that a version of Fischer's account can be developed that is more powerful than the version Fischer presents. Indeed, I will argue that his account could secure comprehensive divine foreknowledge. I will also suggest that Fischer's account renders it plausible that God's beliefs about the future are explained by future events.

Fischer's goal is to provide an account on which God "could know with certainty future contingent propositions in a causally indeterministic world." (*Our Fate*, 38) He wants the result that God could be certain that, for example, you will skip breakfast tomorrow even though your skipping breakfast is not causally determined. Furthermore, he makes things harder by taking on the assumption that "God does not have some "direct apprehension" of the future, and that His [initial] evidence bearing on the future contingent proposition is constituted by facts about the past, present and laws of nature." (*Our Fate*, 32) This might seem like a tall order, but Fischer has a clever proposal.

Fischer begins by noting that it is plausible that we humans can know that p even in cases where our evidence does not entail p. Thus, so long as there are true future contingents, it seems that we could come to know some of them. If I know enough about your character and dispositions, then perhaps I can know that you will skip breakfast tomorrow, even though your skipping breakfast is only 99% probable given current conditions. Fischer then introduces the notion of a "knowledge conferring situation" (KCS). A KCS is a situation such that "When a human being is in a KCS with respect to *p*, and *p* turns out to be true, she thereby has knowledge that *p*." (*Our Fate*, 36)

Fischer imagines a case in which he is in a KCS with respect to the true future contingent such 'Jones will mow his lawn on Wednesday'. Fischer sees no reason to think that God could not also be in a KCS with regard to this future contingent. On Fischer's proposal, when God is able to enter a KCS with respect to a true proposition p, God will go ahead and believe p. But, given the apparent absence of any evidence that entails p, how can God achieve certainty that p? He bootstraps his way:

> God knows on Monday that p...in the same way that an ordinary human being can know this...But unlike an ordinary human being, God knows that if He believes that p, then it follows of necessity that p is true. He knows this via his self-knowledge. He knows that He is essentially omniscient. Thus not only does God know on Monday that Jones will mow his lawn on Wednesday. He knows it with certainty. (*Our Fate,* 37)

So God uses his knowledge of his own omniscience to move from non-entailing evidence to certainty. Here is a natural question to ask about this picture. What happens when God has great evidence for p (based on current circumstances) but p is false? The answer is that God's essential omniscience prevents him from believing p. And of course God will notice that he does not believe p, despite the great evidence for it, and will conclude that p must be false. After all, why else would he have failed to form the belief?

So it looks like Fischer can account for God's certain knowledge of a future contingent p both in cases where there is strong evidence for p and in cases where there is strong evidence against p. (In the latter case God infers p after noticing his failure to believe ~p.) But Fischer does not think he can extend this account in order to generate comprehensive divine foreknowledge of every future contingent truth.

Suppose it is currently 60% likely that you will skip breakfast tomorrow. Fischer thinks that God will refrain from forming an opinion on the matter because "it would be epistemically irresponsible for God to believe any proposition He is not in a legitimate position to know." (*Our Fate*, 39) Thus, even if you will skip breakfast tomorrow, God doesn't know it.

I'm not convinced that it is epistemically irresponsible to believe what you are not in a position to know. Suppose I have good, but not overwhelming, evidence that the Yankees will win the world series. It seems somewhat natural to say "I believe that the Yankees will win but I don't know that they will." And I wouldn't think much of the reply, "then you shouldn't believe it." (For more evidence that Fischer is setting the bar for belief too high see Hawthorne, Rothschild & Spectre's 2016)

What is the appropriate threshold for belief? According to Richard Foley "There doesn't seem to be any way to identify a precise threshold." (Foley 1992, 112) But I think there is a case to be made for the following view:

> Preponderance: *It is permissible to believe p if the epistemic probability of p is above 50%.*

William James observed that we are guided by two goals: "Believe truth! Shun error!" (James 1896) I find it plausible that it is permissible to be concerned equally with both of these goals. And if one gives equal weight to both goals, then it seems one would believe p when the evidence favors p even slightly. To refrain from believing p would be to privilege avoiding error over believing truth. (I owe this argument to Kevin McCain.) Thus I find Preponderance plausible.

If God is disposed to believe p whenever the probability of p is above 50% (unless prevented by his essential omniscience), then God could employ Fischer's bootstrapping method much more often. God will *either* believe p and then bootstrap his way to certainty, *or* notice that he hasn't formed the belief despite the evidence and become certain of ~p. There is one tricky case. Suppose the probability of p is exactly 50%. If God wants to achieve comprehensive foreknowledge using Fischer's method, then it looks as though he will have to arrange the world such that no proposition is ever exactly 50% likely given current conditions. Surely God could arrange for this. Thus, if Fischer's approach is successful, comprehensive foreknowledge is within God's grasp.

One final point, on Fischer's view only true propositions about the future make it past the filter of essential omniscience and are thus believed by God. So it is plausible that p's being true explains why p makes it past the filter and is believed. What explains p's being true? Since we are assuming that p is not determined, present facts look like a poor candidates for explaining p's truth. The most plausible candidate appears to be future facts or events (e.g. the future event of Jones mowing explains why it is now true that he will mow.) But now we have an explanatory chain running from future events to God's beliefs:

Jones mowing at $t_2$→it being true at $t_1$ that Jones will mow→God's belief at $t_1$

And this, of course, is grist for the Dependence Solution's mill. Furthermore, if Fischer's account does lead to the view that God's beliefs depend on the future, we might wonder whether we still have reason to prefer it over a less complex account on which God does possess "direct apprehension" of the future. Perhaps God's beliefs can be directly explained by future events, with no bootstrapping required.[*]

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# BOOK SYMPOSIUM ON "OUR FATE": REPLIES TO MY CRITICS

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I wish to begin by thanking T. Ryan Byerly, Thomas Flint, Christoph Jäger, Penelope Mackie, and Philip Swenson for their extremely insightful and generous critical essays. I have learned a great deal from thinking about them, and attempting to reply to each of the essays.

## REPLY TO BYERLY

### Byerly's Critique

Byerly presents an original and challenging critique of the "incompatibility argument" — the argument or family of arguments that employ the notion of the fixity of the past (in some suitable regimentation) to yield the conclusion that God's comprehensive foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom to do otherwise. (The incompatibility argument is itself silent on whether God's foreknowledge is compatible with human agents acting freely; it would only imply this additional conclusion if acting freely were to require freedom to do otherwise, a requirement I dispute.)

He distinguishes between "direct" and "indirect" responses to the incompatibility argument. The direct responses attempt to show that a particular premise or supposition of the argument is false or question-begging or otherwise problematic. In contrast, Byerly focuses primarily on developing the indirect response. This starts with noting that all versions of the incompatibility argument attempt to prove a conditional: *if* God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge, then no human person is able to do otherwise than what he or she does. But now the proponent of the indirect argument contends that something must explain or ground the fact that God's having such foreknowledge renders it true that no human person is able to do otherwise. As Byerly puts it,

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> Those who defend the incompatibility argument do not (and should not)
> wed their defense of this argument to the view that the ability to do other-
> wise is intrinsically impossible. … But, once it is granted that the ability to
> do otherwise is intrinsically possible, there is considerable pressure to affirm
> that if it does not obtain, something *explains why* it doesn't obtain. … If we
> grant this — that if no person has the ability to do otherwise, then something
> explains why this is so — then it will follow that every version of the incom-
> patibility argument is committed to the claim that God's foreknowledge re-
> quires the existence of something that explains why no human person has
> the ability to do otherwise. (Byerly 2017, 4)

The final step in the indirect response to the incompatibility argument is to
contend that God's having exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge does *not*
imply the existence of something that explains or grounds the (putative) fact
that no human has the freedom to do otherwise.

The basic intuition of the indirect argument is that if an agent is not free
to do otherwise, something must ground of explain this; otherwise it is just
mysterious. For example, we can understand why a person who is chained to
her bed cannot get out of bed; the chains constitute an existing constraint that
limits her freedom. Note that here, as in other cases where it is uncontrover-
sial that an agent lacks freedom to do otherwise, the relevant constraint exists
at the same time as the time at which the agent is alleged not to have freedom
to do otherwise. But if nothing that intuitively constrains the agent exists at
the time in question, then how can it be that the agent lacks freedom to do
otherwise? After all, as Byerly puts it, human freedom to do otherwise is not
"intrinsically" impossible.

In previous work (Byerly 2014), Byerly has argued that many of the best
candidates for what could fulfill what I will call the "grounding requirement"
are not adequate: the truth of God's beliefs, the beliefs themselves, and the
truth of causal determinism. In his contribution to this book symposium,
Byerly further develops this sort of indirect reply, and he considers two ad-
ditional candidates for the grounding requirement: the fixity of God's beliefs
and God's being in what I have called a "knowledge-conferring situation".

We can get the main lines of Byerly's style of argumentation by consider-
ing his way of dismissing the truth of God's beliefs as a candidate for fulfilling
the grounding requirement (in the context of God's foreknowledge). Note
that, if Jones does $X$ at $T_2$ and if God has the relevant kind of foreknowledge,
it seems to follow, and Byerely here supposes that it does follow, that it was

true at some prior time — say, $T_1$ — that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$. But Byerly thinks it is implausible that this fact (that it was true at $T_1$ that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$) explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$. And he offers an argument for this view. After considering various other options with respect to the explanatory relationship between "Jones does $X$ at $T_2$" and "It was true at $T_1$ that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$", Byerly settles on this: Jones doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains why it is true at $T_1$ that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$. But now (according to Byerly) we can see why it cannot be the fact that it was true at $T_1$ that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$ that explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$. This is because Byerly supposes that explanation is transitive. Given this transitivity, it would follow (unacceptably) that Jones doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than $X$ at $T_2$.

Byerly employs a similar style of argument (based on the transitivity of explanation) against the other candidates for fulfilling the grounding requirement. I will return to a consideration of the fixity of God's beliefs as a candidate, but first I will finish my summary of Byerly's critique of the incompatibility argument. He considers the possibility that a proponent of the incompatibility argument will grant the grounding requirement, but insist that *something* (perhaps unspecified) must fulfill it, because the premises of the incompatibility argument are so plausible (and the argument is sound). Byerly goes on to offer two "direct" criticisms of the incompatibilty argument (as I have defended it). Byerly writes:

> First, Fischer's preferred regimentation of the principle of the fixity of the past has it hat hard-type soft facts are part of the 'past' in the relevant sense, and so must remain fixed in any world accessible from the actual world (Fischer 26-31) But, this will imply that the fact that a certain inscription saying that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$ was true a thousand years ago is part of the 'past' in the relevant sense, and so must remain fixed when we consider what Jones can do. This is because various properties of the inscription, such as it's *being an inscription*, are hard features of it, just like God's belief that Jones does X at $T_2$ has the hard feature of *being a belief*, on Fischer's view. Yet, the resulting fatalistic consequences of true past inscriptions are not consequences Fischer wishes to wed himself to in the context of defending the incompatibility argument. (Byerly 2017, 11)

Byerly goes on to write:

> Second, Fischer's defense of the claim that God's past beliefs are 'past' in the sense of being soft past facts with hard features relies upon a question-

able view of properties: namely, that when God holds beliefs at past times, God possesses the very same property that is possessed by human believers when they hold beliefs — viz., the property of *having a belief.* (Fischer, 30) This view will be denied, however, by many who think that properties are particualars and who would maintain, for example, that in each instance in which God holds a belief in the past, he exemplifies a distinct property — the property of having *this particular divine belief*, or *that* one, etc. It is highly questionable whether these latter properties are hard. (ibid., 12)

## Reply to Byerly's Critique

I shall first address Byerly's argument that the fixity of God's prior belief cannot fulfill the role specified by the grounding requirement. Recall that this argument proceeds by way of the transitivity of explanation. I do not deny this transitivity, but I would resist one of Byerly's crucial claims about explanation. As part of a *reductio,* he claims that Jones doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains the fixity of God's belief at $T_1$ that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$. (The argument then proceeds from there to get to the absurd conclusion that Jones doing $X$ at $T_2$ explains why Jones is not able to do otherwise at $T_2$.)

I contend that the proper way to understand the fixity of God's belief at $T_1$ is something like this. God's belief has an element of hardness (temporal nonrelationality), this element would have to be absent were Jones to do otherwise (that is, it is a hard "kernel element," in my terminology), and no agent has it in his or her power so to act that some hard element of a fact about the past (i.e., an element that is in fact present) would be absent. And note that this fact — the conjunctive fact that specifies the fixity of God's belief at $T_1$) is *not* explained *simply* by Jones doing $X$ at $T_1$; further factors must be adduced to get to explain the fact about fixity. Thus, Byerly's argument from the transitivity of explanation that this candidate cannot fulfill the grounding requirement does not go through.

Byerley writes,

> … on Fischer's view (188, 231), the fixity of God's past beliefs is a feature they have simply in virtue of their having the more fundamental feature of being past (in the sense of 'past' operative in the principle of the fixity of the past. (Byerly 2017, 9)

But, as above, I do not claim that the fixity at $T_2$ of God's belief at $T_1$ follows *simply* from the fact that God's belief has a hard element (*i.e.*, that it is "'past' in the sense operative in the principle of the fixity of the past". Rather, it follows

from this point, together with two other crucial points: this hard element must have been absent at $T_1$, if Jones were to do otherwise at $T_2$, and no agent has it in his or her power at a time so to act that some hard element of the past relative to that time would not have been present.

Consider, now, Byerly's direct replies to the incompatibility argument. He points out that on my view, if Jones does $X$ at $T_2$, then a certain inscription (say, made in stone) a thousand years prior to $T_2$ must "remain fixed" when we consider what Jones can do, since the fact that the inscription existed is a hard-type soft fact about the past relative to $T_2$. This is because the fact in question has various hard properties, including the property, *being an inscription*. But this is no problem for my view, since there is no obstacle to supposing that Jones can so act that a certain inscription, which was actually true, would have been false. Recall that the fixity of God's belief at $T_1$ comes in part from the fact that it has some hard element that would have to have been absent, were Jones to do otherwise at $T_2$. But the property of being an inscription, or even the property of being an inscription with its actual content, need not be absent, were Jones to do otherwise at $T_2$. This is a crucial difference from the context of God's foreknowledge. That is, the crucial hard element in the case of God's foreknowledge is a hard *kernel element*, whereas the hard element in the case of the inscription is not.

I turn, finally, to Byerly's contention that we should not think of God has having beliefs, but as having *divine beliefs*. He claims that having a divine belief that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$ is not plausibly construed as a hard property of God $T_1$. This is an interesting worry, and I am not sure exactly how to think about it. From my perspective, however, it should turn out that having a divine belief entails having a belief, in which case God believing at $T_1$ that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$ is indeed a hard-type soft fact about $T_1$. A presupposition of the incompatibility argument, as it was first regimented in contemporary philosophy by Nelson Pike (Pike 1965), is that God's beliefs are not fundamentally different in nature from human beliefs; although they have the feature of being necessarily true, they are still beliefs in the same sense in which humans have beliefs.

## REPLY TO FLINT

*Flint's Critique*

I shall focus on Flint's subtle and insightful discussion of what he takes to be the "basic" fixity of the past principle, (FP). In his formulation (which I am happy to embrace), the principle is:

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

Flint begins by wondering why our prephilosophical intuition that the past is out of our control warrants (FP). He points out that if we were to accept a principle as "unrestricted" as (FP) appears to be, logical fatalism would appear to follow. I agree, and I wish to restrict (FP) to *hard* (temporally nonrelational) facts about the past. This is, after all, what is intuitively plausible; the intuition does not straightforwardly apply to such facts as "It was true at $T_1$ that Jones would do *X* at $T_2$".

But Flint finds (FP), restricted to hard facts, open to question, and he invokes Plantinga's famous example of Paul and the ant colony here. Plantinga has us imagine that some ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday. Were Paul to mow his lawn this afternoon, the colony of ants would be destroyed. But, for some reason, God wishes the colony to survive. God knows that Paul in fact will not mow his lawn this afternoon. But if Paul were to mow, God would have foreseen his so acting, and (to save the ants) would have prevented their moving into Paul's yard last Saturday. Plantinga further supposes that Paul has it in his power this afternoon to mow his lawn. It thus appears that we have an example in which an agent (Paul) has it in his power at a time so to act that some hard (temporally nonrelational) fact about the past (that the ants moved into his yard last Saturday) would not have been a fact.

In reply to this example (and similar examples), I have contended that Plantinga's claim that Paul has it in his power this afternoon to mow his lawn is question-begging, within the dialectical context in which it is asserted, that is, within the context of an evaluation of a "skeptical" argument about human powers (and their relationship to God's foreknowledge). Of course, it would be question-begging (Moore to the contrary notwithstanding) to reply to a Cartesian skeptic about our knowledge of the external world by simply as-

serting that I know that there is an orange tree outside my office window in Riverside, California. Similarly, it is question-begging to reply to a "free-will skeptic", or perhaps better, an incompatibilist about God's foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise, that obviously Paul has it in his power this afternoon to do otherwise, even though God exists and had foreknowledge of his actual behavior this afternoon.

The Cartesian skeptic grants that it is part of common sense that we sometimes know propositions about the external world; but she is challenging this element of common sense. The skeptical argument is strongest when it relies on other deep components of common sense to issue the challenge to another part of common sense. Perhaps the Cartesian skeptic will rely on the principle of Closure of Knowledge under Known Implication, together with the apparent fact that we cannot rule out that we are being deceived in certain ways (for instance, we cannot rule it out that we are brains in vats being stimulated to have false beliefs about the external world [and ourselves]). Similarly, the incompatibilist grants that it is part of common sense that we sometimes are free to do other than we actually do; but she is challenging this element of common sense. The incompatibilist (under consideration here) invokes a suitably restricted (FP), together with the claim that God's prior beliefs are hard facts, or a slightly revised version of (FP), together with the claim that God's prior beliefs have hard kernel elements.

In general, skepticism is most challenging when it questions part of common sense by employing other, apparently equally compelling, parts of common sense. It is always open to one to make the Moorean move in both the contexts of epistemological and free will skepticism, but this sort of move really is not an illuminating reply to skepticism, but simply a failure to take it seriously.

Flint has an interesting and nuanced reply to my response to Plantinga:

> What are we to make of Fischer's criticism? Has Plantinga transgressed the bounds of the dialectically kosher? I don't think so. His suggestion, it seems to me, is simply that it's *reasonable* to think that his story is a possible one — that is, it's reasonable to believe that Paul could have genuine alternatives and those alternatives be related to past events in the way the story suggests. The story, I think, is much more part of a *defensive* strategy than an *offensive* one. Despite his well-known evangelical credentials, Plantinga's endeavor here is (or at least should be) merely apologetic. His story isn't (or at least needn't be viewed as) part of a missionary endeavor to convert the incompatibilist… Rather, he is saying something much more modest. (Flint 2017, 19)

Flint explains what Plantinga is (or can be read as) saying in the following way:

> Look, I know that *you* (the incompatibilist) don't think Paul in my story has
> the power to mow. But I'm inclined to think that he does. And if he does, and
> if the rest of the story were true, then he'd have the power to do something
> such that the ants wouldn't have moved in. I think this is a possible story.
> So I think I'm fully within my rights in denying (FP), and thus in rejecting
> your argument. The story may not move *you* to abandon your theological
> incompatibilism, but that's not what it was intended to do. Its aim was to
> show how one who's *already* a theological compatibilist can coherently (and,
> I think, plausibly) maintain that view when threatened by your (FP)-based
> argument. (ibid., 20)

Flint here raises some difficult and subtle dialectical issues. This is an illus-
tration of something I have believed for a long time: that getting clear on
dialectical issues — what can and cannot legitimately be assumed, who has
the burden of proof, and so forth — is crucial for understanding many cen-
tral disputes about free will and moral responsibility. Flint drives his point
home further by offering a *tu quoque* argument on behalf of Plantinga. Flint
rewrites the last few lines of Plantinga's story to motivate his contention that
it is not "dialectically kosher" to assume *from the start* that (FP) is true:

> … if Paul were to mow his lawn this afternoon, then the ants would not
> have moved in last Saturday. But *for all we know — we can't at this point in
> the discussion just assume anything one way or the other* — it is within Paul's
> power to mow this afternoon. So we can't assume that there isn't an action he
> can perform such that if he were to perform it, then the proposition [that the
> colony of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday] would have
> been false. *And this means that we can't just assume that (FP) is true. But if
> it's not kosher to assume (FP), then the incompatibilist argument doesn't get off
> the ground.* (Flint 2017, 20, italics in the original)

Finally, Flint claims that I engage in the same sort of strategy (when respond-
ing to the argument for logical fatalism) as Plantinga employs (and I criti-
cize). Flint quotes this passage from a paper by Neal Tognazzini and me):

> Consider, for example, the fact that the assassination of JFK occurred 49
> years before we wrote this paper. … this fact relating the assassination of
> JFK to our writing this paper was true even 49 years ago. And yet it seems
> like we did have control over this fact; in particular, if we had waited until
> next year to write this paper, then although it *was* (and is) a fact that JFK was
> assassinated 49 years before we wrote this paper, it *wouldn't* have been a fact.
> (Fischer and Tognazzini, 219; Flint 2017, 21)

But now Flint argues on behalf of a fatalist, "tutored by Fischer's response to Plantinga":

> It is obviously contentious whether (in the specific circumstances in question) Fischer and Tognazini do indeed have the power to wait until next year to write their paper!... The whole point of the fatalist's argument is to put into doubt whether we have the power to do otherwise with respect to ordinary actions — actions with respect to which we typically assume that we can do otherwise. It is obviously not dialectally kosher simply to assume, in Fischer and Tognazini's example, that they do have the power (in the relevant sense) to wait until next year to write. They appear to import ordinary intuitions about our powers into a context in which they are not entitled to bring such intuitions. (Flint 2017, 21)

Flint concludes this part of his critique as follows: "Unless, then, Fischer is willing to accuse *himself* of not keeping kosher in his response to the fatalist, he had best not level such a charge against Plantinga with respect to his reply to the theological incompatibilist." (Flint 2017, 21). In offering his *tu quoque* argument, Flint is essentially saying, if I may put it this way, "So's YOUR momma!"

## Reply to Flint's Critique

Full disclosure: my wife is a (very) distant relative of Thomas Flint. As I wrote above, Flint raises important dialectical issues that are of central importance. But it is not so easy to evaluate them. First, he claims that Plantinga is not trying to present an example that will make an already-committed incompatibilist (who bases her incompatibilism on [FP]) give up her incompatibilism. Rather, Flint interprets Plantinga as offering an "apologetic" or "defensive" strategy, according to which he is presenting an example that shows how an already-committed theological compatibilist can help to render her position "coherent and reasonable".

But it is very difficult to understand exactly what is supposed to be going on here (dialectically speaking). It never was in doubt that compatibilism is "coherent". Further, the theological incompatibilist should concede from the outset that the "plausible" or "reasonable (from the viewpoint of common sense) view would be that (say) Jones has it in his power at $T_2$ to do otherwise, and Paul has it in his power this afternoon to mow his lawn. After all, theological incompatiblism challenges the common-sense view that we are often free to do otherwise. So, if the example of Paul and the Ant Colony is simply meant to show that compatibilism is coherent (logically possible) and reflects

common sense, I don't see how it does much philosophical work. Perhaps Flint thinks, as did the Green Bay Packers' coach Vince Lombardi, that the best offense is a good defense. But it is not clear that this maxim, even if true, applies here.

Think of it this way. Suppose Paul has been kidnapped and chained to his bed (by very heavy chains) at noon, and there is no one who can come to his aid in removing the chains this afternoon. Intuitively, under these circumstances, Paul cannot mow his lawn this afternoon. He is chained to his bed! Drilling down a bit, how can we explain the intuition that Paul cannot mow his lawn this afternoon? I would suggest this: it is a necessary condition of Paul's mowing that he not be chained to his bed, he is chained to his bed, and (intuitively) he has no control over this fact during the relevant period of time (this afternoon). That is, if he were to mow, he wouldn't be chained; but he *is* chained, and he has no control over this fact. The existence of the chains intuitively *contrains* Paul, eliminating his power to do otherwise.

Now consider Jones at $T_2$. God believes at $T_1$ that he would do $X$ at $T_2$, so it is a necessary condition of Jones not doing $X$ at $T_2$ that God believed at $T_1$ that Jones would not do $X$ at $T_2$. Further, God in fact believed at $T_1$ that Jones would do $X$ at $T_2$, and (intuitively) Jones has no control over this fact at $T_2$. The intuitive basis of the claim that Jones has no control at $T_2$ over God's belief at $T_1$ is that God's belief has a hard (temporally nonrelational) kernel element, and given that the hard past is over-and-done-with, no one has it is her power so to act that a hard element of some actual past fact would not have been present. Thus, it seems to me that when we see why we think that the chained Paul cannot mow this afternoon, it becomes plausible that Jones cannot do otherwise at $T_2$; at least we can see that the arguments are structurally similar. In both cases, it is a necessary condition of the agent doing otherwise that some actually obtaining condition *not* obtain, where it seems that the agent has no control of whether or not this condition obtains.

Flint writes that the intuitive idea that the past is fixed should have *some* tug on us,

> [b]ut, again, precisely where that tug should take us — precisely what philosophical principle we should see it as mandating — has been a much-debated issue in philosophical circles for a very long time. To suggest that the vague intuition most of us have regarding the fixity of the past obviously commits us to anything quite so controverisal as (FP) is surely not plausible. (Flint 2017, 20)

Of course, I think that the relevant understanding of (FP) includes the restriction to hard facts or facts with hard elements. So understood, I *do* find that the commonsense intuition that the past is fixed tugs me strongly toward (FP). If certain facts are fixed in part because of their mere pastness (in the relevant sense), they are fixed because they are over-and-done-with. Why would only *some* past facts then be fixed? Facts in the recent past are just as over-and-done-with as facts in the distant past, and micro-facts are just as over-and-done-with as macro-facts. (I thus find Flint's footnote 4 puzzling.)

The restriction of (FP) explains why I would seek to resist the fatalist argument, even while accepting (FP), and it explains why this is not *ad hoc*. It simply is not intuitive or part of common sense that a fact such as "It was true 49 years ago that JFK was assassinated prior to our (Neal Tognazzini and me) writing our paper" is "past" in the relevant sense — over-and-done-with. This brings me to an important dialectical point. I think that philosophical arguments, at least most of the time, should not be directed at folks who have already accepted one of the positions in question — say, theological compatibilism or incompatibilism. Rather, they should be aimed at fair-minded and reasonable *agnostics* about the issue under consideration. (For a further development and defense of this view, see Fischer and Tognazzini 2007.) I believe that a fair-minded and reasonable agnostic about theological fatalism would accept a suitably restricted (FP), but not an unrestricted (FP). Here, the consideration of the principle is *prior to* any views about whether the relevant agent is free to do otherwise; these views cannot permissibly come in at *this* point in the dialectic. But, having accepted a restricted (FP), a reasonable and fair-minded agnostic can be moved toward incompatibilism.

Recall Flint's assertion:

> The whole point of the fatalist's argument is to put into doubt whether we have the power to do otherwise with respect to ordinary actions — actions with respect to which we typically assume that we can do otherwise. It is obviously not dialectically kosher simply to assume, in Fischer and Tognazzini's example, that they do have the power (in the relevant sense) to wait until next year to write. They appear to import ordinary intuitions about our powers into a context in which they are not entitled to bring such intuitions. (Flint 2017, 21)

But we do not simply import ordinary intuitions about powers here. Rather, we claim that a restricted (FP) is plausible and reasonably thought to be licensed by common sense, whereas an unrestricted (FP) is *not*. Given this,

there is no argument on offer to the effect that Neal and I could not wait until the following year to write our paper — that sort of argument would require an unrestricted (FP). So, we are not inappropriately importing an ordinary intuition to the effect that we could have waited into a context in which a skeptical principle that calls this ordinary intuition into question has been put forward; rather, we are presenting to a fairminded and reasonable agnostic only the principle that is plausibly warranted by common sense and then seeing where the chips fall.

Flint offers an alternative way of thinking about the fixity of the past — one which putatively leads to incompatiblism about causal determinism and freedom to do otherwise but not God's foreknowledge and freedom to do otherwise; this is similar to the approach suggested by Philip Swenson, which I will consider below.

## REPLY TO JÄGER

### *Jäger's Critique*

Christoph Jäger's thoughtful critique forces me to come to grips with some fundamental questions about the incompatibility argument — questions I have not been fully aware of, and not addressed, thus far. Perhaps Jäger's key critical point begins with the claim that I contend that (say) God believes at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$ is a hard fact about $T_1$. But I also hold that "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$" is a soft fact about $T_1$. Jäger essentially asks how I can accept both of these claims, given that hardness is closed under entailment, where this principle of closure is restricted to the entailment of contingent facts (that is, if $F$ is a hard fact about $T_1$, and $F$ entails that $G$ — a contingent fact — is a fact about $T_1$, then $G$ is a hard fact about $T_1$). Jäger further points out that if "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$" is indeed a hard fact about $T_1$, then I cannot maintain that the argument for logical fatalism is less cogent than the argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom — a claim that has been dear to my heart for quite some time.

### *Reply to Jäger's Critique*

Nelson Pike, in his pioneering regimentation of the incompatibility argument, denied that propositions can be true at times. He thought that the ar-

gument could get off the ground, even without this assumption. I am less certain that propositions cannot be true at times, and also that the incompatibility argument can go through without this assumption. In any case, as I have regimented the argument, it relies on the supposition that propositions can be true at times. But I have not explicitly addressed the question of what, if anything, *grounds* the truth at a time of a contingent proposition about the future relative to that time. And this is a vexing question.

I begin here by maintaining my implicit supposition in previous work that nothing temporally nonrelational — no hard fact — at $T_1$ grounds the truth at $T_1$ of a proposition such as "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$". Perhaps such facts need not be grounded at all. Or perhaps they are grounded by future facts, such as "Jones does $X$ at $T_2$". (On this view, truth supervenes on being, but it is not necessarily the case that truth at $T$ supervenes on being at $T$, as it were.) This possibility would seem to require eternalism, rather than presentism; but, although eternalism might be necessary, it doesn't appear sufficient to explain how the facts in question (prior truths about contingent future events) can be grounded, and it also raises problems of its own. Nevertheless, I start here with the assumption that "Jones does $X$ at $T_2$" entails "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$", without saying anything further about how (and whether) the latter truth is grounded. Note that, by denying that propositions can be true at times, and thus that contingent truths about the future can be true at prior times, Pike avoids having to address these issues about grounding. As I wrote above, I am unsure whether this sort of move is successful; in any case, Pike's regimentation of the argument (inadvertently) hides or obscures the issues about grounding.

So I begin with the assumption that "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$" is not grounded in a hard (temporally nonrelational) fact that obtains at $T_1$. Now, if hardness is closed under entailment (in the way suggested by Jäger), and if "God believes at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$" is a hard fact about $T_1$, then my claim that there is a crucial asymmetry between the incompatibility argument and the argument for logical fatalism is in jeopardy.

I agree with Jäger that, if one accepts that the fact about God's prior belief is a hard fact about the time at which it is held, and the relevant closure principle, then the asymmetry between the two arguments collapses. I have indeed suggested in some of my previous work, especially my early work on these topics, that God's prior beliefs should be considered hard facts about

the times at which they are held. (Fischer 1983. For an excellent discussion, see Todd 2013.) If God's beliefs are hard facts about the times at which they are held, then either one has to give up the closure principle or give up the asymmetry claim. If God's beliefs are hard, then I am inclined to give up the closure principle. This is because I am more confident that the logical fatalist's argument is problematic (on the assumption that the prior truths are *not* grounded in hard facts about the prior times in question) than that closure obtains. But I have no non-question-begging examples in which the relevant closure principle fails, which puts me in a somewhat less than comfortable dialectical position. (It must — or, perhaps, *could* — be noted that every position regarding God's foreknowledge and human freedom involves *some* discomfort, if only mild metaphysical indigestion.)

Because closure fails, I can maintain that "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$," is a soft fact about $T_1$. And, because we are assuming (thus far) that this sort of fact is not grounded in some hard fact that obtains at $T_1$, there does not seem to be any reason to suppose that it is fixed and out of Jones's control at $T_2$.

Let us suppose, now, that God's belief at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$ is (as I have argued in later work [Fischer 1986), plausibly thought to be a "hard-type soft fact" about $T_1$. Perhaps it is a soft fact insofar as it is not "future-indifferent as regards $T_1$": it entails that time continues after $T_1$ and, indeed, that some intuitively "genuine" or temporally non-relational facts obtain after $T_1$. On my view, it would be a hard-type soft fact insofar as it consists of an individual (God) having a hard property at $T_1$: believing that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$. Now, since "God believes at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$" is a *soft* fact (albeit at hard-type soft fact), the closure principle is not engaged at all, and one does not have to say (for reasons of closure) that "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$) is a hard fact about $T_1$. And, given that this fact is not grounded by a hard fact that obtains at $T_1$, there seems to be no reason to suppose that it is fixed at $T_2$.

But now imagine that "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$" must be grounded by some hard fact at $T_1$. Now the prior truth comes with problematic and heavy "baggage". If Jones were so to act at $T_2$ that "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$" would be false, then he would have to so act that *some* hard fact about $T_1$ — the grounding fact — would not have been a fact. On this grounding assumption, then, "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$"

must be considered fixed and out of Jones's control at $T_2$. After all, I have been supposing that no agent has it in his power so to act that some hard element of the actual past would have been absent. So, on the grounding assumption, the asymmetry between the incompatibility argument and the logical fatalist's argument disappears — at least in regard to fixity.

So, the issue of grounding turns out to be important (and largely hidden in earlier discussions of the incompatibility argument and the logical fatalist's argument). If grounding in hard facts about $T_1$ is not required for facts such as "It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$", then one can maintain that the incompatibility argument is sound, whereas the logical fatalist's argument is not. But if such grounding is required, then both arguments call into question human freedom to do otherwise. They do it in slightly different ways; in the case of the incompatibility argument, God's prior beliefs either are hard facts themselves or have hard kernel elements; in the case of the logical fatalist's argument, "It is true at $T_1$ that God will do $X$ at $T_2$" comes with hard baggage. Either way, Jones cannot do otherwise at $T_2$.

It is interesting to compare the three arguments: the consequence argument, the theological incompatibility argument, and the logical fatalist's argument, on the assumption of the grounding requirement we have adopted in this part of the discussion. In the consequence argument, the relevant premise about the past is indisputably a hard fact about the past. In the theological incompatibility argument, the relevant premise about the past is either itself hard or has a hard kernel element (a hard property). In the logical fatalist's argument, the premise in question is itself soft, but it comes with hard baggage. Here the hardness is not *part* of the relevant past fact (It is true at $T_1$ that Jones will do $X$ at $T_2$), but it is *linked* to that fact in a way that creates hard baggage via a kind of toxic entanglement. All three arguments then get to the conclusion that Jones cannot do otherwise at $T_2$ — and they are all fueled, in one way or another, by the fixity of the hard past

## REPLY TO MACKIE

### *Mackie's Critique*

Penelope Mackie raises two especially important issues for my approach to defending the argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise. First, she point outs that I believe that the

argument can be formulated without employing a Transfer of Powerlessness principle. Instead, I suggest other ways of developing the argument, including a version that simply employs a possible-worlds way of regimenting the intuitive idea of the fixity of the past:

> (FP*) An agent $S$ has it in his power at (or just prior to) $T$ in possible world $w$ to do $X$ at $T$ only if there is a possible world $w^\star$ with the same past as that of $w$ up to $T$ in which $S$ does $X$ at $T$.

Mackie further notes that a compatbilist might simply reject (FP*), and that at some points I suggest that incompatibilists "may simply help themselves to the … Fixity Principle… without attempting to derive it from other premises, a strategy she takes to be "suspipiciously like an attempt to gain the advantages of theft over honest toil." (Mackie 2017, 41) (I should point out that I am admittedly not excessively fond of toil, honest or not.) Additionally, Mackie points out that one argument (not offered by me) that attempts to prove (FP*) from more basic principles appears to depend on the Transfer Principle. (Mackie 2017, 40-1), and thus an argument that employs (FP*)—argued for in this way—would not have dispensed with the Transfer Principle.

She then considers my argument (based on a similar argument by Garrett Pendergraft and me: [Fischer and Pendergraft 2013]) for (FP*) based on practical reasoning and the "fixity of reasons". My argument here is based on examples with the structure of the *Salty Old Seadog* and *Icy Patch*, in which it seems that a compatibilist is committed to very implausible results about reasons for action. Here is *Icy Patch*:

> Sam saw a boy slip and fall on an icy patch on Sam's sidewalk on Monday. The boy was seriously injured, and this disturbed Sam deeply. On Tuesday, Sam must decide whether to go ice-skating. Suppose that Sam's character is such that if he were to decide to go ice-skating at noon on Tuesday, then the boy would not have slipped and hurt himself on Monday. (Fischer, *Our Fate* Introduction, 18; and Fischer 1994, 95)

Here I claim that a compatibilist who denies (FP*) must say that Sam has access on Tuesday to a possible world in which the accident didn't happen on Monday, and thus that Sam should take this as a reason to decide to go ice-skating on Tuesday. But this is just crazy. My basic point here is that a denial of (FP*) appears to lead to implausible results about practical reasoning in certain contexts.

## *Reply to Mackie*

I agree with Mackie that some arguments for (FP*) employ the transfer of powerlessness principle. If these arguments are sound, then the transfer principle is (in conjunction with the other elements of these arguments) *sufficient* for (FP*). But we don't *yet* have it that the transfer principle is *necessary* in order to establish or defend (FP*). (My co-author and I make this point, and further discuss related issues, in [Fischer and Ravizza 1996].)

As Mackie acknowledges, I have offered the argument from the fixity of reasons for (FP*), so I don't simply leave it as a brute intuition, as it were (although more on this below). But she criticizes my argument as follows:

> Sam is deliberating, on Tuesday, whether to go skating on Tuesday. He has (and believes that he has) the ability to go skating on Tuesday. (Let us refer to this as 'the ability to go skating$_r$.') He believes that there is a possible world, the B-world, in which he goes skating on Tuesday, but there is no terrible accident on Monday. Moreover, (if Sam is a compatibilist), Sam believes that the B-world is one in which he *exercises* his ability to go skating$_r$. Nevertheless, Sam can be rationally certain, on Tuesday, that the B-world *will* not be actual (and will no be actual even if he exercises his ability to go skating$_r$.) For (whether he is a compatibilist or an incompatibilist) he knows that whatever he *can* do, anything that he *will* do will be an extension of the actual past. And the actual past on Tuesday includes, as he is aware, the accident on Monday. Given all this, Sam would obviously be crazy to take the fact that the accident does not occur on Monday in the B-world, plus the fact that the B-world is one in which he exercises his ability to go skating$_r$, as a reason for going skating on Tuesday. So he would obviously be crazy to follow the Accessiblity Principle [the principle that it is appropriate to take into account, in one's practical reasoning, reasons that obtain in any world that is 'accessible']. (Mackie 2017, 48-9)

Mackie asks, "How could rationality require *S* to take into account, in deciding whether to do *Y*, a world that she can be certain will not be actual even if she does *Y*? Yet that is exactly what the Accessibility Principle dictates." (ibid, 49) But I should have thought that in these contexts "actual" is being used *indexically*. That is, the words "actual world" do not rigidly designate a particular world. Suppose the world in which the accident occurs on Monday and Sam is deliberating on Tuesday whether to go ice-skating is *pw1*. Now it is quite clear that when he decides not to go ice-skating on Tuesday, this is an extension of the past in *pw1*. But it is *not* true that no matter what Sam were to do on Tuesday, this would be an extension of the past in *pw1*. The compati-

bilist is supposing that Sam *can* go ice-skating on Tuesday. Given a rejection of (FP*), this implies that Sam has access to a *different* possible world, pw2, and in pw2 the accident did not take place on Monday.

Recall that Mackie writes, "Sam can be rationally certain, on Tuesday, that the B-world *will* not be actual (and will not be actual even if he exercises his ability to go skating$_r$.)" The following is true: Sam can be rationally certain, on Tuesday, that the B-world will not be *pw1*, and will not be *pw1*, even if he exercises his ability to go skating. But he cannot be rationally certain, on Tuesday, that the B-world would not be the actual world, if he were to exercise his ability to go skating; that's because, under this counterfactual supposition, the actual world would be *pw2* (that is, "the actual world" would pick out *pw2* under the supposition that Sam goes skating on Tuesday.) I therefore maintain my position that the compatibilist (who denies [FP*]) is in an uncomfortable position: she must countenance reasons for action that we intuitively think are not appropriately considered as such.

Finally, I'm not sure that an argument is *needed* for (FP*). We have to start somewhere in our philosophical argumentation, and it seems to me that a principle such as (FP*) might plausibly be thought to be "basic" or "primitive", and not subject to proof by reference to even more basic ingredients. If a transfer of powerlessness principle is employed to support (FP*), why stop there? That is, what is the basis for the Transfer Principle? Again: it would seem that at least *some* elements of one's argument have to be basic, and I find (FP*) extremely plausible and a candidate for being basic, if anything is. (For the suggestion that [FP*] corresponds to a basic, intuitive conception of our agency and practical reasoning and also a conception that helps us properly to analyze Newcomb's Problem, see (Fischer 1994, esp. 87-110.)

## REPLY TO SWENSON

### *Swenson's Critique*

Full disclosure (again): I was Philip Swenson's dissertation supervisor at UC Riverside. (Of course, this does *not* imply that he learned more than I did from this interaction!) Swenson (in this paper and previous work [2016]) develops an important and fascinating way of defending the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom: the Dependence Solution, referred to above by Thomas Flint and developed, in an inchoate form, ear-

lier by Michael Bergmann (personal correspondence). (I present and discuss Bergmann's version of the dependence solution in *Our Fate*, 93-94). On this approach, one can defend the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom without thereby being committed to the compatibility of causal determinism and such freedom.

First, the ants are back! (They have not just colonized Paul's backyard, but this — and many other — discussions of the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human freedom. And living in Riverside, California, I know just how pesky ants can be.) To refresh your memory about the example of Paul and the Ant Colony, please refer back to my discussion of Flint's critique above. Swenson attributes to me (at least for the sake of discussion) the view that the Ockhamist can maintain that there is a possible world with the same hard past in which Paul mows. This is because I hold that the Ockhamist, or at least a certain kind of Ockhamist, will insist that God's prior belief that Sam will not mow is not a hard fact about the past (nor is it a fact with any hard kernel element). But Swenson is not clear that it is plausible that there is such a possible world:

> The conjunction of the following two facts appear to entail that Paul does not mow:
>
> (a)  God intended (for reasons independent of Paul) to keep the ants away from all mown lawns.
>
> (b)  The ants were in the lawn. (Swenson 2017, 54)

Swenson points out that (a) and (b) entail that Paul does not mow his lawn this afternoon, and thus there are no possible worlds in which (a) and (b) are both truth and Paul mows his lawn. Thus, an Ockhamist would have to say that either (a) or (b) is a soft fact, but Swenson finds this implausible.

Swenson goes on to draw the following moral of this story:

> The best way to respond, I think, is to say that all the business about temporal relationality was beside the point. What matters is dependence. The Dependence Solution allows for the claim that Paul is free to mow his yard. This is because 'the ants were in the yard' is plausibly explained by Paul's choice [and not the other way around]. Thus it need not be held fixed. Its lacking temporal relationality is neither here nor there. (ibid., 55)

So on Swenson's approach, which embraces the Dependence Solution, we can hold that (a) but not (b) is fixed (i.e., out of Sam's control this afternoon). On the Ockhamism I was considering, we hold fixed (b) but not (a). Of course, I

am no proponent of Ockhamism, but was merely attempting to explore options open to someone who accepts this doctrine, in the context of a specific example: Plantinga's Paul and the Ant Colony example. And note that (a) is no part of the example, as Plantinga presents it.

But perhaps Swenson will say that an Ockhamist solution should be expected (and, indeed required) to generalize to a version of the example that includes (a), and I would agree with this point. I believe that the Ockhamist should say that (a) is a soft fact about last Saturday, since it is not over-and-done-with last Saturday (or this afternoon). The problem for this sort of move is that it is not clear why (a) is not over-and-done-with last Saturday, since it does not entail that time continue after last Saturday, and is thus "future-indifferent" relative to last Saturday. So it is not straightforward to motivate the claim that (a) is a soft fact about last Saturday employing resources based on temporal relationality. I think that this is a really good and interesting problem that Swenson raises for Ockhamism, a view that I, of course, am keen to criticize as well.

### Reply to Swenson's Critique

But why not accept the Dependence Solution? I simply find the fixity of the hard past ([FHP] in Swenson's notation, and [FP*] in mine), extremely plausible; it is, no pun intended, *hard* for me to jettison this highly intuitive picture. We think of the future as a garden of forking paths — paths that branch off one fixed hard past. But, we do not think that the future and past are symmetric in this way; intuitively, we do not think that there are multiple pasts that are parts of paths we genuinely can take into the future. (I try to motivate this picture of practical reasoning and our powers in Fischer 1994, esp. 87-110.) So I find it extremely plausible that the hard past — the past that is genuinely over-and-done-with now — is now out of my control; I do not have the power so to act that it would have been different, and I do not have access to a possible world in which it was different. So, for me, it is dependence, and not hardness, that is neither here nor there, with regard to fixity. I just do not see how it is plausible that Sam has access this afternoon to a possible world in which the ants had not moved in last Saturday; after all, they DID move in last Saturday.

To use an example from American football, the Atlanta Falcons "choked" terribly and lost the last Super Bowl in the fourth quarter to the New England

Patriots. I know that they would love to do something about this now; the Falcons would love to have access now to a possible world in which they did not lose the Super Bowl. But there is just nothing they can do about it, insofar as the game is now over-and-done-with. Even if we added information about God's intentions — for example, perhaps God (like Donald Trump) is a big New England Patriots fan, and intended prior to the game that the Falcons not win the Super Bowl (if the game takes place at all). That is, we can add in an intention that is parallel to the intention envisaged by Swenson in the Ant Colony Case. This would be neither here nor there. The Falcons cannot now do anything about their disastrous Super Bowl loss. And Hilary Clinton cannot now do anything about her political strategy in her campaign against Donald Trump. These facts are hard facts about the past — cold hard facts, I suppose — and thus out of any human agent's control now.

Consider Paul this afternoon. The proponent of the dependence solution claims that he can mow his lawn, and thus he can so act that God would not have believed last Saturday that Paul would mow this afternoon (or that he has access this afternoon to a possible world in which God didn't believe last Saturday that Paul would not mow this afternoon). But why is it dialectically permissible simply to assume that Paul has the power this afternoon to mow his lawn, given that such a power would require the hard past to be different? If God's prior belief or the ants moving in last Saturday *depends* on Paul's not mowing, this is interesting, but why does this bear on whether Paul has the power on Saturday to mow his lawn? In general, if $p$'s obtaining depends on my not doing $X$, and I am free to do $X$, then I have control over $p$'s obtaining. So far so good. But if $p$'s obtaining depends on my not doing $X$, and I am *not* free to do $X$, then the mere fact that $p$'s obtaining depends on my not doing $X$ does *not* establish that I have control over $p$'s obtaining. The proponent of the Dependence Solution cannot simply help himself to the claim that S has the power to do $X$, despite S's not actually doing $X$; this, after all, is precisely what is at stake.

My point might be put as follows. Even given the dependence Swenson identifies, if an agent S's doing otherwise would require a fact such as the ant's moving in not to have been a fact, then it is problematic simply to assume that S can do otherwise. So we have again arrived at a point in the evaluation of the arguments at which it has become clear how important the dialectical issues are, and it is not clear to me that adverting to dependence (explanatory

dependence of the sort Swenson has in mind) really gets us very far. What we have, on the Dependence Solution, is this: some hard facts about the past have an *additional feature* — they are explanatorily dependent on the relevant future action. But why would this in itself imply that the agent has control over the hard facts in question? After all, in order to possess this sort of control, the agent must have the power to do otherwise, but it would be entirely question-begging (in my view) simply to assert that the agent has this sort of power, given that the power in question would require access to a possible world in which the hard past is different.

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# MOST PEERS DON'T BELIEVE IT, HENCE IT IS PROBABLY FALSE

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**Abstract.** Rob Lovering has recently argued that since theists have been unable, by means of philosophical arguments, to convince 85 percent of professional philosophers that God exists, at least one of their defining beliefs must be either false or meaningless. This paper is a critical examination of his argument. First we present Lovering's argument and point out its salient features. Next we explain why the argument's conclusion is entirely acceptable for theists, even if, as we show, there are multiple problems with the premises.

## 1. THE 'NUMBERS COUNT' ARGUMENT STATED

In the recent discussion over peer disagreement, i.e. disagreement between parties that are equally apprised of the relevant evidence, equally capable of evaluating it, and equally aware of the disagreeing other, two positions stand out. First there is the 'conciliatory' view according to which, roughly speaking,[1] awareness of a disagreeing peer is evidence against one's own view — and a reason to change it in some way.[2] Second there is the 'steadfast' view according to which, roughly speaking, awareness of a disagreeing peer is not evidence against one's own view — and no reason to change it. Rob Lovering has recently argued for something like a third position in the disagree-

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1   A much more precise presentation and discussion of the two views is Bryan Frances, *Disagreement* (Polity, 2014).

2   Various suggestions have been made as to what sort of change is called for. See, for instance, David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", *The Philosophical Review* 116, no. 2 (2007) (disagreeing peers should 'move to one another'), Hilary Kornblith, "Belief in the Face of Controversy", in *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (OUP, 2010) (disagreeing peers should go agnostic).

ment debate. The core of this position is that numbers count: the more peers don't believe p, the more reason we have to think that p is false. If many peers don't believe p, the proper conclusion to draw is that p is probably false. This paper is an examination of Lovering's case for this 'numbers count' position.

Lovering argues that the mere fact that the friends of theistic arguments have failed to convince a majority of professional philosophers discredits their view. He summarizes his argument as follows:

> The very existence of [nontheistic philosophical] epistemic peers makes it clear that theistic inferentialists have failed to make the inferential case for theism to them. And *that* they have failed to do so is a problem […] I refer to this as the "problem of the theistic inferentialists". […] I shall then argue that of the most plausible possible solutions to this problem — each is either inadequate or incompatible with theistic inferentialist's defining beliefs. Thus, I conclude that the problem *of* the theistic inferentialists […] is a problem *for* the theistic inferentialists — an objection to their defining beliefs.[3]

To get a clear view of the argument[4], elaboration is required. *First*, who are the theistic inferentialists and what are their defining beliefs? Lovering is very clear about this: theistic inferentialists are theists "who are or were professional philosophers or who have or had enough philosophical training to be one."[5] He

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3    Rob Lovering, *God and Evidence: Problems for Theistic Philosophers* (Bloomsbury, 2013), 21. The argument we shall be discussing is the substance of ibid., ch. 2; the chapter incorporates much material from Rob Lovering, "The Problem of the Theistic Evidentialist Philosophers", *Philo* 13, no. 2 (2010). What Lovering 2013 refers to as 'theistic inferentialists' is the same group of persons as what Lovering 2010 refers to as 'theistic evidentialist philosophers'.

4    Lovering's argument is the first argument in a larger philosophical project that contains five more arguments against (or problems for) various forms of theism (see Lovering, *God and Evidence*.). His second argument states that the fact that noninferential evidence for God's existence (i.e. religious experiences) is scarcely apprehended, is a problem for theistic noninferentialists (i.e. theists who believe that there is noninferential probabilifying evidence for God that is discoverable in practice). His third argument is aimed at theistic fideists (i.e. theists who believe that there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence for God's existence but believe that it's nonetheless morally acceptable to have faith that God exists). Lovering argues that having such faith without evidence can result in endangering, harming, and/or violating the rights of others. Lovering's fourth and fifth argument are aimed at all theists. The fourth states that skeptical theism (the claim that our cognitive abilities are too limited to make claims about what God does or will do) casts doubt on theistic claims. The fifth states that divine omniscience is impossible because God cannot know what it is like not to know. In this paper we focus exclusively on Lovering's first argument because, arguably, most theists adopt (some form of) theistic inferentialism. We also believe this argument is his most original one.

5    Ibid., 4.

mentions the millennia-old tradition to which belong such philosophers as St. Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, William Paley, Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, Robin Collins, and William Lane Craig.[6] Their defining beliefs, he says, are

(a) that God exists,

(b) that there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence,

(c) that this evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice.[7]

Lovering indicates that the phrase "discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice" means to rule out scenarios in which the evidence exists but is inaccessible to humans. An example of such a scenario is the existence of a goblet, the evidence for which is a sound that lies outside the range in which humans can hear. This evidence, he says, is discoverable in principle, but not in practice.[8]

*Second*, the summary statement says that

theists have failed to make the inferential case for theism" to their non-theistic philosophical peers. The evidence adduced for this is that "according to a recent survey of 931 philosophy faculty members, 15 percent accept or lean toward theism, 73 percent accept or lean towards atheism ('religious sceptics'), and the rest accept or lean toward the 'other' category (of which some undoubtedly accept or lean towards agnosticism). Since accepting or leaning toward atheism or 'other' involves not accepting or leaning toward theism, an overwhelming 85 percent of these philosophy faculty members do not accept or lean toward theism.[9]

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6    And so, if theistic inferentialists failed to convince non-theists, it is not for lack of trying. Lovering's reference to the long history of theistic arguments is meant to make the argument intuitively all the more compelling. And in a way it does. An argument that has been around for a long time and has not convinced, say, 85% of its intended audience, is worse off than a relatively new argument that has not convinced 85% of its intended audience. In the case of theistic arguments this matter is complicated by the fact that there are so many different 'kinds' of theistic arguments (cosmological, ontological, moral, design arguments, among others) and that each 'kind' of argument has seen so many different 'versions' — some of which are relatively new. This is a point we deal with in section 2(b), where we discuss premise P2.

7    Ibid., 20.

8    Lovering, "The Problem of the Theistic Evidentialist Philosophers", 2.

9    Lovering, *God and Evidence*, 2. Lovering's source is the survey that was eventually published as David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, "What do philosophers believe?", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 170, no. 3 (2014); preliminary versions of this survey have been available on the internet. Lovering, *God and*

*Third*, the summary statement of the argument says that the most plausible explanations as to why theistic evidentialists have not convinced 85 percent of their peers, are problematic for or incompatible with the theistic inferentialist's defining beliefs. Lovering deems the following explanations to be the most plausible ones[10]:

#1   Nontheistic philosophers are intellectually inferior to theistic philosophers when it comes to evaluating the inferential evidence for God's existence.

#2   Nontheistic philosophers are culpably ignorant of the inferential evidence for God's existence.

#3   God prevents nontheistic philosophers from noticing the inferential evidence for God's existence.

#4   Theistic philosophers have been unable to adequately articulate the inferential evidence for God's existence.

#5   At least one of the theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs is false.

#6   At least one of the theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs is cognitively meaningless.[11]

Lovering next argues that explanations #1–#4 are inadequate, whereas explanations #5 and #6 adequate. This means, of course, that #5 and #6 are

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*Evidence*, 23, fn. 2 refers to http://philpapers.org/suveys/results.pl?affil=Target+faculty&areas 0=0&areas_max=1&grain=coarse.

10   Ibid., 25–38.

11   Lovering's list of explanations is in fact longer. He also lists three solutions that all involve the claim that theists lack inferential evidence. The three solutions differ in what is added to this claim, viz. (i) that the lack is not a problem, since theists may find such inferential evidence in the future, or (ii) that the lack is not a problem, since nontheistic philosophers don't have evidence for the non-existence of God that has silenced the theistic philosophers, or (iii) that the lack is not a problem, since agreement among philosophers is rare anyway. We have edited the list in the body of the text for obvious reasons: the three omitted explanations are all instances of explanation #5 — as they go against the theistic inferentialist's defining belief (b), according to which there is inferential probabilifying evidence for God's existence. We are assuming that the theistic inferentialist in believing (b) and (c) must also be held to believe that he *possesses* the evidence. If he were not held to believe this, he can hardly be charged for not having convinced 85% of his peers. One cannot convince someone else by evidence that one doesn't possess (but merely believes to exist).

supposed to be *better* explanations than the others. This may not mean that #5 and #6 are supposed to be *the best* explanations full stop, but it does mean that they are the best of the set.

Given these clarifications we can now state Lovering's argument somewhat more precisely as follows:

P1: Theistic inferentialists have failed to convince an overwhelming majority (viz. 85 percent) of their intellectual peers.

P2: The best explanation of the fact stated in P1 is that at least one of the theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs is false or meaningless.

C:  Therefore, it is probably true that at least one of the theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs is false or cognitively meaningless.

This argument is an inference to the best explanation. As a number of authors have noted, saying that E is the best explanation of fact F does not establish the truth of E, nor that E is probably true, it only renders E more probable than its competitors. For all we know the best explanation may be "the best of a bad lot", to use Van Fraassen's expression.[12] This may be so because the list of possible explanations is not exhaustive, and hence additional explanations might be better than those not coming out best. One may want to fault Lovering's argument simply for being an inference to the best explanation. Since such criticism is not new and would not have anything in special to do with Lovering's argument, we won't pursue it further.

Should we be convinced by this argument? The first thing to see is that the argument is formally valid: if the premises are true and acceptable, then so is the conclusion. But are the premises true and acceptable? We argue they are not.

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12   Bas C. van Fraassen, *Laws and symmetry* (Clarendon Press, 1989), 143; an overview of other criticisms of inferences to the best explanation can be found in Igor Douven, "Abduction", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2011, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/abduction/, section 3.1; Peter Lipton, "Is the Best Good Enough?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 93 (1993).

## 2. THE ARGUMENT EXAMINED

### *a. The Argument's Conclusion*

We begin our examination by considering the argument's conclusion. This conclusion is such that it could be true in many different ways, since each of the inferentialist's defining beliefs (a), (b), or (c) could be false or meaningless. In this section we argue, first, that not all the ways in which the conclusion could be true, are equally damaging for the theistic inferentialist, and second, that the theist's presumed defining belief (c), i.e. "that the evidence for God's existence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice", is problematic independently of religious concerns one might have.

The argument's conclusion could be true in various different ways. Let us canvass the possibilities. Are any of the inferentialist's defining beliefs (a), (b), and/or (c) *meaningless*? They certainly *look* meaningful: they are intelligible, we can envision what would have to be the case if they were to be true, we can draw inferences from them, etc. And Lovering's 12-sentence discussion of this matter[13] gives no reason to take the possibility that (a), (b), and/or (c) are meaningless seriously. Even Lovering doesn't seem to think that (b) and (c) are meaningless. For he seems to be implying that there *is no* probabilifying evidence for God's existence — something he can only say if he thinks that (b) is a meaningful proposition. And he clearly thinks that (c) is meaningful — for, as we noted, he even *explains* its meaning. As to (a): of course, Neopositivists like A.J. Ayer thought the statement "God exists" is meaningless.[14] But they adopted the verification criterion of meaning that, as Plantinga once said, has receded into the obscurity it so richly deserves.[15] It has so receded for a number of reasons none of which Lovering even tries to refute or undermine. Hence we feel justified to put the "meaningless" part of the conclusion to one side.

This means that the argument's conclusion could be true if at least one of the inferentialist's defining beliefs is false. Hence, if an theistic inferentialist is to be convinced by Lovering's argument, at least one of her defining beliefs

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13   Lovering, *God and Evidence*, 38.
14   Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Dover Publications, 2012 [1952]).
15   See Alvin Plantinga, *God and other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1967).

must be shown to be false. We shall now argue that not all the ways in which the argument's conclusion could be true, would, if true, be equally damaging for the inferentialist *qua theist*. It would be quite damaging if the inferentialist *qua theist* were forced to give up (a), theism. If an inferentialist theist were forced to give up one of her defining beliefs, she would almost certainly not opt for (a). How great would the damage be if she were to retain (a), but reject (b)? The damage would be smaller for she would still be a theist. Inspired by Alvin Plantinga's 'Reformed Epistemology', for example, she might adopt the idea that belief in God can be entirely rational and proper even in the absence of inferential, propositional, probabilifying evidence.[16] She would then, of course, no longer be an *theistic inferentialist as defined by Lovering*, but still a theist. If an inferentialist were to drop belief in (b), but retain her theism, she still faces Lovering's argument against theistic noninferentialism (see footnote 5).[17] The smallest damage for a theistic inferentialist *qua theist*, however, would be to retain (a) and (b) and to reject (c), i.e. to reject the claim that inferential evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice.

What would such a rejection look like? In order to see that, we first need to take a closer look at (c). As noted, for Lovering evidence for X *is discoverable in principle* provided the evidence exists. And evidence for X *is discoverable in practice* provided it falls within the range of human experience. As we shall now show, however, it is debatable *when* evidence for X falls within the range of human experience. Let us reconsider Lovering's example of a sound that is evidence for a goblet, but falls outside the human hearing range. Why should we think that the evidence really falls outside that range? After all, we can easily imagine a hearing aid, or some other device, that would make the evidence, somehow, accessible to someone's experience. If Jane has such a device, but Jack has not, then for Jane the evidence is discoverable in practice, but not for Jack. Hence, *being discoverable in practice* must be relativized to

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16    Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (OUP, 2000).

17    Lovering's argument against this kind of theism (that proceeds from the problem of divine hiddenness, Lovering, *God and Evidence*, 41–62) lies beyond the scope of this paper. There are, however, interesting responses to the problem of divine hiddenness that Lovering doesn't discuss: see the papers by Murray, Garcia, Wainwright, Moser, and Kvanvig in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser, eds., *Divine hiddenness: New essays* (CUP, 2002); see also Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil: The Gifford Lectures 2003* (Clarendon Press, 2006), Lecture 8.

persons. Moreover, suppose Jane has the device but she is in coma; should we then say that for her, in that condition, the evidence for the goblet is *discoverable in practice*? It would seem not. Hence, *being discoverable in practice* must be relativized to conditions as well. The problem with (c) is that it doesn't contain these relativizations. Incorporating these in (c), we get

>   (c\*)    that this evidence for God's existence exists, but it is not always accessible for everyone in every condition.

The case for (c\*) can be strengthened. Think of Fermat's famous Last Theorem that was eventually proved by Andrew Wiles. Most contemporary professional mathematicians are unable to follow all the details of Wiles' proof.[18] Of course, in other conditions, e.g. the condition of having studied the proof intensely, or the condition of having improved mathematical powers, the evidence for the Last Theorem is accessible, i.e. *discoverable in practice*. But for many mathematicians, being in the conditions they are in, and having the mathematical powers they have, the evidence is not accessible, i.e. not discoverable in practice.

Where does this leave us? Here: a theistic inferentialist *qua theist* can happily accept Lovering's conclusion, so accept that one of the theist's inferentialist's presumed defining beliefs (as defined by Lovering) is false. For a theist can happily grant that (c) should be rejected — it is untenable! This means that no theist, not even a theist who believes there is evidence for God's existence, should be *shaken* by Lovering's conclusion — but rather endorse it. This situation is brought about by the fact that Lovering hasn't specifically argued for the falsity of either (a), or (b) or (c), and presumable has not realized that (c) is not as plausible to a theist as he anticipated it would be. He thus leaves space to the theist to reject (c) and hence enables her to agree with his conclusion that was intended against the theist!

To this we may add that someone who accepts (a) and (b), rejects (c) but accepts (c\*), still qualifies as a theistic inferentialist, albeit not in the way defined by Lovering. Lovering's criticism concerns a rather extreme, and

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18   This is not to deny that many contemporary mathematicians have knowledge enough of some high-level ideas that enables them to intuitively see how the proof works and what it involves. But this contrasts with knowing the intricacies of the proof. On this difference see William P. Thurston, "On Proof and Progress in Mathematics", in *18 Unconventional Essays on the Nature of Mathematics*, ed. Reuben Hersh (Springer, 2006).

as we argued untenable, version of theistic inferentialism, as it includes the problematic belief in (c). A weaker and more plausible version of theistic inferentialism, one including (c*), however, is left unscathed by anything that Lovering has said.

So, a theist could happily accept Lovering's conclusion by rejecting (c) and, by adopting (c*) still qualify as a modest theistic inferentialist.

We could leave it at this. But that could look cheap. For Lovering's argument is informed by ideas, incorporated in premises P1 and P2, that merit further attention, even if they aren't part of an argument whose conclusion should give a theist, not even a (modest) theistic inferentialist, pause. For these premises *do* contain ideas that *are* problematic for theists. We now argue that P1 and P2 are problematic as they stand, and should not be accepted.

### (b) Premise P1

Premise P1 ("Theistic inferentialists have failed to convince 85 percent of their intellectual peers") states an alleged fact. The evidence for it is the Bourget/Chalmers survey — a survey of the beliefs of professional philosophers from reputable institutions in mainly the Anglo-Saxon world, esp. the U.S.[19] In this section we argue that this survey does not support the alleged fact that theistic inferentialists have failed to convince 85 percent of their peers, and hence that P1 cannot taken to have been established by Lovering. Crucial to our argument is a certain understanding of what it is for one person to fail to convince another[20]:

> S failed to convince S* that p is the case iff: (i) S presented evidence in favor of P to S* in such a way that S* became aware of the evidence, (ii) S* seriously studied the evidence, and (iii) S* wasn't convinced by the evidence that p is the case.

To work our way to our argument, we consider the survey in somewhat more detail. Philosophers from elite PhD granting departments mainly in the English-speaking world were asked to answer no less than 30 question,

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19   See Bourget and Chalmers, "What do philosophers believe?". The survey was sent to all regular faculty members of 99 leading departments of philosophy. Of these, seven were located in non-English speaking countries in continental Europe. The total target group consisted of 1972 philosophers of whom 931 (47,2%) responded.

20   Lovering offers no analysis of this phrase.

such as " Apriori knowledge: yes or no?", "Abstract objects: yes or no?", "Free will: compatibilism, libertarianism, or no free will?", and also "God: theism or atheism?" This latter question was answered as follows[21]:

| Atheism | 73 % |
|---:|---|
| Theism | 15 % |
| Agnostic/undecided | 12 % |

This overview indicates that 85 percent does not accept theism.

Although this is isn't going to affect our argument directly, it is highly relevant to point out that these numbers are problematic in that they are obtained from a survey among philosophers from only elite departments mainly in the English-speaking world. For Neil Gross and Solon Simmons found that people at elite institutions are less religious than people in the academy in general.[22] A more representative sample of philosophers, e.g. also coming from small liberal arts colleges and state colleges that only offer undergraduate degrees, would have given less skewed numbers.[23]

Can it be concluded, on the basis of the survey, that theistic inferentialists *have failed to convince* 85 percent of their intellectual peers, as P1 has it? It seems not — at least, not on our plausible analysis of "failed to convince". For the survey doesn't indicate that the participants satisfy conditions (i) and (ii). I.e. the survey doesn't provide evidence that the participants were aware of the theistic arguments, nor that they have seriously studied them. It is certainly the case that the examples of theistic inferentialists philosophers Lovering mentioned (St. Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, William Paley, Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, Robin Collins, and William Lane Craig) presented their arguments with the goal of convincing their epistemic peers.

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21   Ibid., 476, percentages rounded.
22   Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, "The Religiosity of American College and Univ. Professors", *Sociology of Religion* 70, no. 2 (2009). Gross and Simmons draw their conclusions from a survey among full time college and Univ. professors in the USA. They do not mention how many people were contacted but they got a response of 1417. The results of the top 50 universities in the U.S. News and World Report Ranking were compared to other institutions. Participants could choose between the statements 'I don't believe in God'; 'I don't know whether there is a God'; 'I do believe in a higher power'; 'I find myself believing in God some of the time'; 'While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God'; 'I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it'.
23   Ibid. found that the majority of professors, even at elite institutions, are religious believers.

It is, however, not unreasonable to think that their arguments only reached a limited number of epistemic peers. In the current academic climate it is not unlikely that publication pressure forces academics to focus their research (very) narrowly and hence to not familiarize themselves with theistic evidence if this lies outside of their research focus. This means that the survey, strictly speaking, provides no evidence for the proposition that theistic inferentialists have *failed to convince* their peers. Hence, P1 cannot be considered to be established by the evidence adduced.[24]

Lovering might respond that there are philosophers who we know *were* or *are* familiar with most or the most important arguments for the existence of God but were not convinced.[25] However, this is too small a minority to conclude that the theistic inferentialists have failed to convince the majority of academic peers.

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24   Also, it is unlikely that those who accept or lean towards atheism and who have indeed studied the inferential evidence for theism, have studied *all* or even *most* of the evidence that has been adduced by theistic inferentialists — and such arguments are numerous. Alvin Plantinga listed 25 arguments, most of them dependent on different evidence, cf. Alvin Plantinga, "Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments: Lecture Notes", (unpublished manuscript, 1986). The recent *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* lists 11 arguments, each of them involving different sorts evidence, see William L. Craig and James P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). And especially the ontological and cosmological arguments have a great number of variants (for a survey of ontological arguments, see Plantinga Alvin Plantinga, ed., *The Ontological Argument from St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* (Macmillan, 1968), and Mirosław Szatkowski, ed., *Ontological Proofs Today* (Ontos, 2012); for a survey of cosmological arguments, see William Lane Craig, *The cosmological argument from Plato to Leibniz* (Macmillan, 1980), and Emanuel Rutten, *Towards a Renewed Case for Theism: A Critical Assessment of Contemporary Cosmological Arguments* ([S.l.: s.n.], 2012). As it is unlikely that the majority of philosophers accepting or leaning towards atheism are familiar with most of the inferential evidence for the existence of God, it cannot be claimed that the evidence *fails to convince* the majority of philosophers. For failing to convince, on our plausible analysis, requires awareness of the evidence and a serious study of it. But these remarks are strictly speaking beside the point — the point being that the Bourget/Chalmers survey simply offers no evidence that conditions (i) and (ii) for 'failing to convince' are satisfied, and hence cannot be adduced as evidence for P1 ("Theistic inferentialists have failed to convince 85 percent of their intellectual peers").

25   E.g. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (Clarendon Press, 1982), Nicholas Everitt, *The non-existence of God: An introduction* (Routledge, 2003), Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (CUP, 2006), and Herman Philipse, *God in the Age of Science? A Critique of Religious Reason* (OUP, 2012).

Lovering might also respond that theistic inferentialists had ample time to convince their epistemic peers. The fact that their arguments have been around for centuries combined with the fact that after all those centuries few academic philosophers consider themselves theists could yield a negative verdict on the theistic inferentialist's defining beliefs, especially on (a). We respond by noting that St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and many other likely *did* succeed in convincing many of their contemporary and even many of their subsequent epistemic peers. Hence, a reference to the long history of theistic arguments does not support P1, but rather weakens it. Reference to the long history of theistic arguments also does little to evade the problems with P1 that we discussed above. Notwithstanding the fact that these arguments have a long history, it is still not unlikely that many current academic philosophers have not studied many, or most, theistic arguments. Furthermore, some theistic arguments are of relatively recent date — for example Moreland's argument from consciousness.[26] No argument from having a long history (if such an argument would be compelling at all) has a grip on such recent arguments.

There is, moreover, empirical evidence relevant to this issue that was available to Lovering, but that he has not taken into consideration. The Bourget/Chalmers survey indicates that among philosophers who specialize in the philosophy of religion (and hence are more likely to have studied the evidence in detail), 73 percent lean toward or accept theism.[27] But this means that if the following is a good argument

> The fact that 85 percent of philosophers don't believe in God is best explained by supposing that at least one of the theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs is false,

then the following argument must be equally good:

> The fact that 73 percent of philosophers of religion are theists, is best explained by supposing that the theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs are true.

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26   James P. Moreland, "The argument from consciousness", in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William L. Craig and James P. Moreland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). The argument claims that the phenomenon consciousness is best explained by God's existence.

27   Bourget and Chalmers, "What do philosophers believe?", 482.

It might in fact even be better, for philosophers of religion may be thought to be the experts on arguments for God's existence.

One might, however, be sceptical about this last suggestion for the following reason: the overrepresentation of theists in the philosophy of religion might indicate that theists are too much influenced by prior beliefs when they evaluate religious arguments. It might indicate a confirmation bias.[28]

In order to evaluate this, another recent survey is relevant, one conducted by De Cruz and De Smedt.[29] Their survey confirmed the findings of Bourget/Chalmers: among philosophers of religion the percentage of theists is high — some 73 percent. This survey presented eight arguments for theism, and eight arguments for atheism, and participants (who were recruited through philosophy mailing lists) were asked to rate the strength of these arguments. Participants were also asked to indicate their philosophical area of specialization, and whether they identified themselves as 'theist', 'atheist', or 'agnostic/undecided'. One outcome of the survey is that theists rated arguments that support theism significantly higher than atheists. Another outcome is that atheists rated arguments against theism significantly higher than theists. In fact De Cruz and De Smedt found a strong correlation between religious belief (or lack thereof) and the assessment of arguments. So, if there is a confirmation bias, it works both ways, which takes the sting out of Draper's and Nichols's argument. DeCruz and De Smedt conclude: "We thus found a confirmation of our prediction that religious belief significantly influences the evaluation of religious arguments: theists, atheists and agnostics differ in how they evaluate arguments for and against the existence of God. The results are highly significant overall."

The main conclusion of this section is that the evidence that Lovering offers in order to established P1 is insufficient to the task. The secondary conclusion is that if Lovering's case for P1 is deemed to be compelling, then an

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28    This has been suggested by Paul Draper, Ryan Nichols, and Sherwood J. B. Sugden, "Diagnosing Bias in Philosophy of Religion", *Monist* 96, no. 3 (2013).

29    Helen de Cruz and De Smedt Johan, "How do philosophers evaluate natural theological arguments? An experimental philosophical investigation", in *Advances in religion, cognitive science, and experimental philosophy*, ed. Helen Cruz and Ryan Nichols, Advances in experimental philosophy (Bloomsbury, 2016) The survey was completed by 802 participants of which 82 percent were professional philosophers. 40.5 percent self-identified as theists and 40.4 as atheists. The remaining 19.1 self-identified as agnostics.

analogous case for the conclusion that the theistic inferentialist's beliefs are true can be deemed equally or even more compelling.

### (c) Premise P2

Lovering devotes most of his attention to premise P2: "The best explanation of the fact that the vast majority of philosophers remain unconvinced by the theistic inferentialists is that at least one of the inferentialists' defining beliefs is false."

Since P2 makes a comparative claim about what *best* explains a certain fact, if we want to evaluate P2 we will have to compare various explanations and estimate their relative strengths.

Note that Lovering doesn't hold

*Falsity Explains Disbelief*: If most people disbelieve P, that fact is best explained by P's falsity,

which is a principle that is clearly false, as the following example bears out: at one time most people disbelieved heliocentrism, but this fact, surely, is not best explained by heliocentrism's falsehood. Rather, Lovering adopts something like the following principle

*Most Experts Don't Believe Falsehoods* (MEDBF): if a majority of the experts (so people who are experts in a field to which P belongs) don't believe in P, this fact is best explained by P's falsity.

Should we accept MEDBF? There seem to be fields where this principle is clearly true. For example, in the field of climate studies, the vast majority of experts don't believe the proposition that there is no global warming; and you might think that this is best explained by that proposition's falsity. Likewise, in the field of cosmology, experts don't believe in geocentrism; and this, again is best explained by geocentrism's falsehood. But there seem to be other fields, economics and psychiatry are examples, where the numbers of dissenting experts rise. If a majority of 60 percent economists disbelieve Keynesianism, then this fact is *not* obviously best explained by Keynesianism's falsity. This is just to say that in this field MEDBF isn't clearly true. We ask: what accounts for this difference? We answer: the difference is accounted for by the availability, in a field, of established facts. Climate science, cosmology and other natural sciences have conjured up innumerably many established facts. Economics and psychiatry less so. Intuitively, differ-

ent fields of study can be placed on a continuum that measures the number of established facts in a field. And now the following principle commends itself (again at an intuitive level): the more established facts a field counts, the more MEDBF will be true of experts in that field, and the less established facts a field counts, the less MEDBF will be true of experts in that field.

Now P2 betrays a commitment to MEDBF. This raises the question to what degree MEDBF is true in the field in which Lovering is moving. That is to say: is the field of philosophy such that the experts in it are such that MEDBF is true of them? For an answer we need to ask whether philosophy has conjured up established facts. The answer, we fear, must be: not very many. Philosophy in general and metaphysics and epistemology in particular are not fields with many established facts, and they are hence unlike climate science and cosmology. Because of this the study of them doesn't seem to provide us with information about parts and aspects of the world. This is familiar to every working metaphysician and epistemologist.[30] There are no established facts about, say, the existence of universals (nominalists and realists still disagree), the existence of time (endurantists oppose perdurantists), the relation between minds and bodies (dualism is by no means a dead option), etc. There are no established facts about the nature of knowledge, the nature of justification, about whether internalism or externalism is correct, about whether contextualist views of knowledge state it like it is etc. This is not to deny that there *are* metaphysical or epistemological facts. But it is to deny that there are many *established* metaphysical or epistemological facts.

One problem with P2, then, is that it assumes MEDBF and MEDBF is only applicable to philosophy if we assume that there are established philosophical facts, of which there aren't many.

Where does this leave us with respect to Lovering's preferred explanation of the fact that the vast majority of philosophers remain unconvinced by the theistic inferentialists — the explanation being that at least one of the inferentialists' defining beliefs is false (= explanation #5)? Here: #5 assumes that MEDBF true in the field of philosophy. We have thrown cold water on this assumption, and hence on #5, and hence on P2.

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30    See for instance Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 3rd ed. (Perseus, 2009), 10–11; David J. Chalmers, David Manley and Ryan Wasserman, eds., *Metametaphysics: New essays on the foundations of ontology* (OUP, 2009) is testimony of the fact. This point is less acknowledged by epistemologists.

Explanation #5 raises another worry that Lovering does not even address. If the best explanation of the fact that 85 percent of the philosophers remain unconvinced by the theistic inferentialists is that some of the theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs are false, the question arises: what explains the fact of the other 15 percent? If the explanation for not believing "God exists" is the falsity of that proposition, then what can the explanation for *believing* that proposition be? Lovering could argue that the 15% made an (honest) mistake. This response, however, is weak because 15% of 1972 philosophers still amounts to a significant number which stands in need of an explanation. Neither can the explanation be that "God exists" is true, for it is presumed to be false. This leaves us, probably, with the usual suspects, i.e. explanation in terms of projection, childhood-neurosis, evolutionary by-product or adaptation etc. However, Lovering has barred that way for himself. For when he discusses explanations #1 and #2 of the fact that 85 percent remain unconvinced — explanations that involve theological doctrines like the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, or the doctrine that sin impairs both intellect and will — he says: "if theistic inferentialists were to believe that nontheistic philosophers are … inferior by simply assuming a theology to be true, nontheistic philosophers could likewise assume an atheology to be true, one that entails that theistic inferentialists are the ones who are dispositionally inferior. This would … do nothing more than lead to an impasse."[31] But if this is Lovering's line, then he cannot give an explanation for the remaining 15 percent.[32] And if, his own words notwithstanding, he *would* attempt such an explanation, then, by parity of reasons, the theist must be allowed *her* explanation of the 85 percent fact. This means that the other explanations, that Lovering deems inadequate, are back on the table. And so now the question to consider is whether #5 is really the *best* explanation of the 85 percent fact — i.e. an explanation that is *better* than its competitors #1–4, or than any other possible explanation that Lovering has not listed.

Is explanation #5 ('at least one of the inferentialist's defining beliefs is false' — and here we concentrate on (a) and (b), and leave (c), which is, as

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31   Lovering, *God and Evidence*, 27.
32   Lovering could still argue that the 15% simply made a mistake but he cannot make this claim without assuming the falsity of theism.

we have argued untenable, out of consideration) *better* than explanation #1 ('nontheistic philosophers are intellectually inferior to their theistic colleagues')? We have argued that #5 is unsatisfactory. Is it nonetheless *better* than #1? Well, #1 itself isn't plausible either: there is no empirical evidence that indicates that non-theists are intellectually inferior (or superior) to theists. Is nonetheless one of them the *better* of the two? On the basis of what we have said so far, this cannot be decided.

Is perhaps explanation #2 ('nontheists are somehow culpably ignorant of the evidence of God's existence', perhaps due to the lack of a receptive attitude,[33] or due to the noetic effects of sin'[34]) better than either explanation #1 or explanation #5? Lovering claims that it is unlikely that nontheistic philosophers en masse wilfully reject evidence for God's existence or refuse to consider it. He affirms that a similar claim as explanation #2 in other domains of philosophy would not be convincing. For example, it would not be appropriate if theistic inferentialists were to explain disagreements with nontheistic philosophers over ethics by claiming the latter are culpably ignorant by lacking a receptive attitude or the cognitive effects of sin. However, we think that lacking in receptive attitude, and cognitive effects of sin, may very well be a *better* explanation than #1 or #5. And this for a number of reasons. Firstly, wilfully rejecting theism is not the same as lack of a receptive attitude or suffering from noetic effects of sin (as Lovering seems to suggest). Wilful rejection suggests a conscious decision not to give the evidence of God's existence the attention it deserves. Lovering cites Paul Moser and Alvin Plantinga as authors who argued for something like explanation #2. Especially Plantinga's explanation does not fit Lovering's framing as 'wilful rejection' well. Plantinga suggests that nontheistic philosophers remain unconvinced because of the noetic effects of sin. Being subject to the noetic effects of sin does not mean that people consciously reject evidence for God's existence. They rather find themselves in a state where the force of the evidence is not clear to them. Moser's suggestion of a lack of receptive attitude on behalf of nontheistic philosophers also does not amount to a conscious decision not to give the evidence its fair due. On his view, a receptive atti-

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33    Paul K. Moser, "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding", in Howard-Snyder; Moser, *Divine Hiddenness*.

34    Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*.

tude encompasses much more than an intellectual decision but also a change in one's direction of life and priorities.[35] Lovering only argues against the stronger claim of wilful rejection. He gives no argument against the possibility of noetic effects of sin or a lack of receptive attitude among nontheistic philosophers. If there is theistic inferential evidence, the fact that not all philosophers are theists may at least in part be explained by a lack of receptive attitude, or cognitive effects of sin. There is also reason to think that culpable ignorance may be more an issue in the debate over God's existence than in other debates in philosophy. As Plantinga has said, the cognitive effects of sin may have an effect on knowledge of God above anything else.[36] Another reason for taking #2 seriously is that inferentialist evidence alone may only very rarely be sufficient for conviction. An analogy with moral psychology illuminates our point. It has been argued that certain moral truths cannot be believed by persons who lack certain emotions — even when those truths are presented to them with rigor, force and show of argument. The presence of such emotions is a necessary condition for someone to acquire the moral belief in question.[37] Something similar may be true for theistic belief. This means that in addition to the explanation of the 85 percent fact in terms of lack of receptive attitude and cognitive effects of sin, the explanation may be in terms of the absence of certain emotions. Studies on persons with autism spectrum disorder confirm this point and suggest that they lack the necessary emotions concerning mind reading to be receptive for religious belief.[38] A recent cognitive theory of atheism elaborates on this. Gervais and Norenzayan suggested that the intuitive processes leading to religious belief

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35    Moser writes: "We need a change of receptive attitude to apprehend the available evidence in the right way. This change involves the direction of our lives,including our settled priorities, not just our intellectual assent.", in Paul K. Moser, "Divine Hiddenness Does Not Justify Atheism", in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. Vanarragon, (Blackwell, 2004), 47.

36    Plantinga writes: "Our original knowledge of God […] has been severely compromised […]. [B]ecause of the fall, we no longer know God in the same natural and unproblematic way in which we know each other and the world around us." Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 205.

37    Shaun Nichols, *Sentimental Rules: On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgment* (OUP, 2004); Jesse Prinz, "The emotional basis of moral judgments", *Philosophical Explorations* 9, no. 1 (2006).

38    Ara Norenzayan and Will M. Gervais, "The origins of religious disbelief", *Trends in cognitive sciences* 17, no. 1 (2013).

can be revised or overruled by analytic processes. Results from priming experiments confirmed their theory.[39] Their point was confirmed by two other studies.[40] Since religious belief requires more emotional or imagination like styles of thinking, an overemphasis on analytic thinking is likely to make people less receptive for belief in God. One could thus argue that doing a certain kind of analytic philosophy, like logic, formal epistemology or formal philosophy of science, makes some philosophers less receptive for belief in God. It is also possible that non-theists lack a receptive attitude due to confirmation biases as De Cruz and De Smedt have argued.[41]

One may very well think that this (augmented) explanation #2 is better than #1 and #5, as there is empirical evidence for it, which there is not for Lovering's preferred but inadequate #5, nor for #1. Moreover, #2 is fully compatible with the questionnaire evidence. To take #2 as a live option does not entail that if it is a correct, it provides a complete explanation of the 85 percent fact. Perhaps for some nontheistic philosophers #2 provides the complete explanation, whereas for others it provides a partial explanation at best.

In cases where explanation #2 provides only a partial explanation, #4 ('theistic inferentialists have inadequately presented the evidence') may do additional explanatory work. There is no reason to think that inferentialists always present their evidence in the best of ways. We return to this point below. This may explain at least in part why they have failed in convincing their nontheistic peers. #4 also has the virtue of being fully compatible with the 85 percent fact. There is no need to ask whether #4 is a *better* explanation than #2, as they may both be correct.

As to #3 ('God prevents nontheistic philosophers from noticing the inferential evidence') theists may have theological reasons for thinking this may be true in some cases. For example, in response to the problem of divine hiddenness a number of theistic philosophers have argued that God

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39   Will M. Gervais and Ara Norenzayan, "Analytic Thinking Promotes Religious Disbelief", *Science* 336, no. 6080 (2012).

40   Gordon Pennycook et al., "Analytic cognitive style predicts religious and paranormal belief", *Cognition* 123, no. 3 (2012).

41   Cruz and De Smedt Johan, "How do philosophers evaluate natural theological arguments? An experimental philosophical investigation".

hides himself to allow for free moral actions or spiritual growth.[42] Again, this explanation needn't compete with #2 and #4: all three of them may in some cases be partially true. Lovering's problem with this explanation is that it seems *ad hoc*. He returns to his goblet analogy and writes: "Suppose the believers explained their failure to make their case to the skeptics on the grounds that evidence of the goblet may be found only by those who already believe — or are disposed to believe — that the goblet exists. This may be true, but looking in from the outside, such an explanation appears ad hoc."[43] Our examples suffice to show that explanation #3 is not ad hoc. God can have reasons to hide himself and hence prevent (some) nontheistic philosophers from noticing inferential evidence for his existence.

Explanation #4 ('Theistic inferentialists have discovered evidence of God's existence, but they have been unable to adequately articulate this evidence to their sceptical counterpart') is also not as implausible as Lovering claims. Lovering himself gives two examples of theistic inferential evidence that is very difficult to understand, viz. William Craig's cosmological argument that relies on 'metaphysical time' and Alvin Plantinga's modal ontological argument. Lovering, however, argues that a God who would want to let himself be known would not solely rely on very difficult evidence. He argues that this explanation conflicts with God's goodness, as it is very unlikely that God would only let his existence be known through complicated evidence. He adds that at least some theistic inferentialists appear very skilled in articulating the evidence for God's existence (his examples are Richard Swinburne, William Craig and Thomas Aquinas). Since we do not argue that explanation #4 by itself can explain the small number of convinced philosophers, we need not deny that at least some theistic inferentialists were able to present the evidence adequately. Since the impact of one philosopher is limited, it is likely that not all philosophers know about the arguments of skilled philosophers like Swinburne, Craig and Aquinas (this especially holds for the first two). Some nontheistic philosophers might only have heard arguments by less skilled philosophers.

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42    E.g. Michael J. Murray, "Deus Absconditus", Laura L. Garcia, "St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness", both in Howard-Snyder; Moser, *Divine Hiddenness*.

43    Lovering, *God and Evidence*, 28.

Lovering also neglects the fact that philosophical arguments in general have become more complex during the last decades. For example, whereas arguments for moral realism were fairly straightforward for a good part of the history of philosophy, recent versions are far more intricate. Theistic arguments are no different. This is mainly a result of counterarguments that led to refinements and more nuance. As a result, many philosophical arguments are harder to understand, not necessarily because defenders lack skill but mainly because understanding them requires more training and background knowledge.

As to Lovering's point that God's goodness conflicts with difficult evidence, we note that there is no conflict. Lovering's point is that a good God would provide clear and simple evidence for his existence. A God that only allows for complicated evidence will remain hidden for many people and this is a problem for any claim to his goodness. However, Lovering's argument is about academic philosophers. Since academic philosophers can be expected to understand, in principle, difficult philosophical evidence, God is not putting unreasonable demands on them when the evidence for his existence is complicated.

What we suggest, then, is that the conjunction of explanations #2, #3, and #4 provide a *better* explanation of the 85 percent fact than #5 and #1 for quite obvious reasons. First, #5, as we have suggested earlier on, doesn't really explain anything, whereas the conjunction of explanations does. Moreover, whereas there is no empirical evidence for #5 or #1, there is some empirical evidence for the conjunctive explanation.

Lovering could respond that explanation #5 is a more simple explanation than a conjunction of explanation #2, #3 and #4 and that #5 is therefore a better explanation. The criterion of simplicity however only holds if all other things are equal. But in this case they are not equal. For we have argued that #5 fails for independent reasons.

## 3. ONE MORE PROBLEMATIC FEATURE OF THE ARGUMENT

The point we will be making in this section regards an 'ingredient' of Lovering's argument that is neither a premise, nor a conclusion. Perhaps it can be thought of as an implicit background assumption. The point concerns the relation between probability and conviction, or better: the relation between probability and the power to convince. Lovering clearly assumes that if evidence is probabilifying, then it is (also) convincing evidence, i.e. then it (also)

has the power to convince persons — perhaps not just any person, but certainly the well-educated rational person. We argue against this by providing a counter example that stands for a whole class of like cases. The example shows that the fact that a piece of inferential evidence for claim C fails to convince any (or many) persons, doesn't entail that the inferential evidence isn't therefore good evidence for C. It is supposed to show that there can be (very) good probabilifying evidence for propositions that are not widely believed.

The example comes from the history of science. Copernicus provided inferential probabilifying evidence for heliocentrism. Nonetheless, his evidence didn't convince very many of his contemporaries. Heliocentrism was not widely accepted until well into the 18th century. Yet few people will deny that Copernicus adduced probabilifying evidence for heliocentrism. Other examples are easy to come by.

But if this is correct, so if the fact that evidence fails to convince doesn't mean that the evidence therefore isn't good probabilifying evidence, this is an additional reason to be sceptical about Lovering's argument. After all, Lovering suggests that if the evidence adduced by theistic inferentialists doesn't convince 85 percent of the philosophers, this means (because it is best explained that way) that the evidence adduced isn't probabilifying evidence. But we have seen that this is wrong. And it better be. For Lovering's assumption, if true, would be a most effective science stopper, as the heliocentrism case brings out. New ideas, also in science, will as a rule always meet with resistance and rejection, even if the evidence for them is probabilifying. Hence, a background assumption of Lovering's argument should be rejected for reasons that having nothing to do with religious belief.

## 4. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, then, we have argued that:

- An theistic inferentialist can gladly accept the conclusion of Lovering's argument ("It is probably true that at least one of theistic inferentialist's defining beliefs (a), (b), and (c) is false or cognitively meaningless"). She can accept that without giving up (a) and (b), viz. if she gives up (c), for which there is solid reason. She can still continue to be a theistic inferentialist, in a somewhat weaker sense, viz. by adopting the independently plausible (c*).

- Premise P1 ('Theistic inferentialists have failed to convince the vast majority (i.e. 85 percent) of their intellectual peers') has not been shown by the evidence to be true, as the evidence that is adduced doesn't indicate that those who have filled out the questionnaire have actually seriously studied the inferentialists' evidence.

- Premise P2, about what best explains the 85 percent fact, has not been established as it relies on the problematic assumption that MEDBF (the principle that says that most experts don't believe falsehoods) is applicable to philosophy, which assumes there are established philosophical (metaphysical and epistemological) facts. This is problematic in that there are very few established philosophical facts.

- Premise P2 seems in fact false: #5 just doesn't seem the best explanation of the 85 percent fact. The conjunctive explanation of #2, #3, and #4, for all the evidence indicates, does a better job.

- The argument presupposes that if evidence is probabilifying, it is convincing evidence. This presupposition, if true, would be a most effective science stopper. But it isn't true.[44]

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# WHY THE PERFECT BEING THEOLOGIAN CANNOT ENDORSE THE PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES

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**Abstract.** I argue that perfect being theologians cannot endorse the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (AP). On perfect being theology, God is essentially morally perfect, meaning that He always acts in a morally perfect manner. I argue that it is possible that God is faced with a situation in which there is only one morally perfect action, which He must do. If this is true, then God acts without alternative possibilities in this situation. Yet, unless one says that this choice is not free, one must say that God has acted freely without alternative possibilities.[1]

## WHY THE PERFECT BEING THEOLOGIAN CANNOT ENDORSE THE PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES

In this paper, I develop a counter-example to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (AP). In section I, I will define AP; in section II, I will argue for my counter-example to AP; and, in section III, I will address objections. An important clarification must be noted before going any further: my paper does offer what I believe is a counter-example to AP, but this counter-example, if successful, is only threatening to the perfect being theologian. As the name suggests, perfect being theology holds that God is an "absolutely perfect" being.[2] I argue that, if the theist affirms perfect being theology, then she is faced

2    Mark O. Webb, "Perfect Being Theology", in *A companion to philosophy of religion*, ed. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper and Philip L. Quinn, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 227.

with a counter-example to AP, meaning that she cannot rationally believe in the truth of AP while maintaining her commitment to perfect being theology.[3] Given this, non-theists and theists who do not endorse perfect being theology will not find my argument threatening to their belief in the truth of AP.

### I: AP Defined:

AP defines freedom as the following:

> "a person [S] does an action A of his own free will only if [S] could have done otherwise."[4]

AP specifies a necessary, not a sufficient, condition of freedom. Thus, according to AP, all situations in which S does A and lacks alternative possibilities are situations in which S is not free. Given this, if I can provide a single example in which an agent acts freely with respect to A yet lacks alternative possibilities, then I will show AP to be false, because then it would be clear that AP is not necessary for freedom.[5]

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3    Wes Morriston has made a similar argument about the connection between God's necessary moral perfection and His omnipotence. Morriston ultimately argues that "there is no possible combination of attributes that includes both omnipotence and necessary moral perfection" (Wes Morriston, "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?", *Religious Studies* 37, no. 2 (2001): 158. Thus, he concludes that the perfect-being theologian must either (1) endorse necessary moral perfection and reject omnipotence or (2) reject necessary moral perfection and endorse omnipotence (158). Morriston's argument is similar to mine, in that we both argue that there is an incompatibility between two central features of perfect-being theology. However, my argument is importantly different from Morriston's, in that (1) Morriston and I argue for incompatibilities between different features of perfect-being theology, and (2) while Morriston argues that this incompatibility means that we should reject one of the two features of perfect-being theology, I argue that the incompatibility means that we should *re-interpret, not reject*, divine freedom so that it is compatible with God's moral perfection.
4    David P. Hunt, "The Simple-Foreknowledge View", in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 86.
5    I use 'AP' rather than 'PAP' to refer to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities. Although some philosophers use PAP in place of AP, many take PAP to be a claim about moral responsibility and have seen AP as a nearly identical claim about freedom. For a discussion of the differences between these principles, see Kevin Timpe, *Free will: Sourcehood and its alternatives,* Continuum studies in philosophy (Continuum, 2008), 21–22 and Robert Kane, "The Contours of Contemporary Free Will Debates", in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane, 2.th ed., Oxford handbooks in philosophy (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 17.

## II: AN ARGUMENT FOR A COUNTER-EXAMPLE TO AP

To begin, I will outline my argument in premise-conclusion form, after which point I will explain the justification of each premise.

(1): God is essentially morally perfect.

(2): if God is essentially morally perfect, then He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations.

(3): thus, He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations [(2), (1)].

(4): if it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X), then if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X.

(5): it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X).

(6): if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X [(4), (5)].

(7): if God must necessarily do action X in situation Y, then God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y.[6]

(8): God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y [(7), (6)].

(9): if God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities), then alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom.

(10): God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities).

(11): thus, alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom [(9), (10)].

(12): if alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom, then AP is false.

(13): thus, AP is false [(12), (11)].

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6    To clarify, (7) and (8) state that God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y *with respect to* X specifically.

To begin, I will justify (1): God is essentially morally perfect. As stated, my argument is directed exclusively at perfect being theologians; as such, I will assume the truth of perfect being theology for the sake of my argument. Perfect being theology holds that God is an "absolutely perfect" being.[7] For the most part, Christians and Western Theists alike endorse this view. As Mark Webb states, the belief that God is an absolutely perfect being "is agreed on by most Jews, Christians, and Muslims", and it has been endorsed by philosophers ranging from Anselm to Plantinga.[8] Thus, within the western philosophical tradition, it is uncontroversial to claim that God is an absolutely perfect being.

Perfect being theology entails that God is essentially morally perfect. If God is an absolutely perfect being, then it follows that He is a morally perfect being. As Laura Garcia states, "perfect goodness [i.e. moral perfection] is one of those attributes included in the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being."[9] The claim that God's absolute perfection entails His moral perfection is uncontroversial. As an absolutely perfect being, He possesses all perfections. Being moral is clearly a perfection; thus, it follows that, if God is absolutely perfect, then He possesses the property of moral perfection. But, perfect being theology makes a stronger claim than this; it holds that God is *essentially* morally perfect. In short, the perfect being theologian claims that God has the essential property of moral perfection. Briefly, a property P "is an essential property of an object O just in case it is necessary that O has P if O exists."[10] In other words, if P is an essential property of O, then in all possible worlds in which O exists, O will have P. Thus, to say that God is essentially morally perfect is to claim that, in all possible worlds in which He exists, He has the property of moral perfection. Again, this is agreed on by perfect being theologians. As Garcia notes, the proponents of perfect being theology hold that moral perfection is an essential property of God.[11] Edward Wieranga confirms this when he claims that "theists agree that…God is essentially good."[12] After all, if God is an absolutely perfect

7    Webb, "Perfect Being Theology", 227.
8    Ibid.
9    Laura L. Garcia, "Moral Perfection", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 217.
10   Teresa Robertson and Philip Atkins, "Essential vs. Accidental Properties", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2016.
11   Garcia, "Moral Perfection", 217.
12   Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An inquiry into divine attributes* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1989), 203.

being, then He will be the most perfect being possible. Clearly, God is more perfect if He possesses the property of moral goodness essentially rather than accidentally. Thus, perfect being theology entails that God is essentially morally perfect. So, (1) is justified.[13]

Next, I will justify (2): if God is essentially morally perfect, then He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations. If object O possesses property P essentially, then it is necessary that O has P in all possible worlds in which O exists. So, an essentially morally perfect being possesses the property of moral perfection in all possible worlds in which this being exists. God is necessarily existent, meaning that He exists in all possible worlds. So, God possesses the property of moral perfection in all possible worlds. Being morally perfect (i.e. instantiating the property of moral perfection) involves acting in a morally perfect manner.[14] Since God is morally perfect in all possible worlds and at all times within those worlds, and since being morally perfect entails acting in a morally perfect manner, it follows that God always acts in a morally perfect manner. So, (2) is justified. Now, (3) (thus, He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations) follows from (2) and (1).

But, at this juncture, an objector might claim that God can be morally perfect while not always acting in a morally perfect manner. This is false. If God is essentially morally perfect, then, in all possible worlds and at all times within those worlds, He will instantiate the property of moral perfection. Since instantiating this property entails acting in a morally perfect manner, and since He always has this property in all possible worlds, it follows that in all possible worlds and at all times within these worlds, He acts in a morally perfect manner. If He always acts in a morally perfect manner in all possible worlds, it follows that there is no possible world in which He does not act in a morally perfect manner. If this is true, then it is logically impossible for Him to not act in a morally perfect manner.[15] Thus, if He is essentially morally

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13    Also, it is important to note that perfect-being theology claims that God "exists necessarily" Garcia, "Moral Perfection", 217, meaning that He exists in all possible worlds. Thus, if God is morally perfect in all possible worlds in which He exists, and if He exists in all possible worlds, it follows that He is morally perfect in all possible worlds.

14    To clarify, when I say that exemplifying the property of moral perfection means acting in a morally perfect manner, this includes inaction. Even though, grammatically speaking, inaction is different from action, both can be morally evaluated as actions. So, divine inaction could be a morally perfect action in a given situation.

15    If there is no possible world in which X is true, then X is logically impossible.

perfect, He necessarily acts in a morally perfect manner, and He cannot act in a not morally perfect manner. In short, if there is one possible world in which He is not acting in a morally perfect manner, then He does not possesses the property of essential moral perfection. Since He does possess this essential property, it follows that there is not a single instance in which He is not acting in a morally perfect manner. This is agreed upon by perfect being theologians. As Garcia states, "according to perfect being theology, God necessarily acts in accordance with moral principles",[16] meaning that it is impossible for Him to not act in accordance with moral principles. Or, as Wieranga says, because "God is essentially good" it follows that "it is not possible that he not be good."[17] Finally, William Rowe and Frances Howard-Snyder hold that "God cannot become less than absolutely perfect."[18] So, God's essential moral perfection entails that He cannot ever act in a manner that is not morally perfect.[19]

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16    Ibid., 225.

17    Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, 203.

18    William Rowe and Frances Howard-Snyder, "Divine Freedom", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2008.

19    One might object that this account of moral perfection generates a problem for God's omnipotence (see Morriston, "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?", 143–44 for an articulation of this objection). After all, it seems like doing something evil is logically possible, and God's omnipotence entails that he should be able to do all things that are logically possible. Thus, on a very intuitive definition of omnipotence, God should be able to do evil; hence, my account, which entails that He cannot do evil, is false. This objection is beyond the scope of this paper, but I will briefly respond to it. Although Morriston does not endorse this view, he describes a Thomistic account of the relationship between omnipotence and moral perfection that supports my view; on this Thomistic view, "omnipotence requires the maximum possible amount of active power — not maximum liability to error. In a well-known passage in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas argues that God cannot sin precisely because He is omnipotent. 'To sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence. Therefore it is that God cannot sin, because of His omnipotence.' [*Summa Theologiae*, I. 25. 3.] On Aquinas's view, the 'ability to fall short' is not a genuine power. So far from being required for omnipotence, it is 'repugnant' to it. Now since choosing evil is a way of 'falling short' of what (at the deepest level) one is trying for, it follows that the inability to choose evil is not a weakness, but a strength. Since it provides security against failure, this unique inability entails more power, not less" (157). If this Thomistic view is unsatisfactory, I later argue that it is logically impossible, given His essential moral perfection, for God to do anything evil; if this is true, then there would be no inconsistency between omnipotence and moral perfection, because omnipotence never requires God to do anything that is logically impossible.

In total, God's essential moral perfection entails that He always does a morally perfect action. Yet, the question remains as to the nature of the morally perfect action. Presumably, if God is morally perfect, He must be perfect according to some theory of morality, namely whichever theory of morality is true. So, there is a debate about whether God is a Kantian, Utilitarian, Virtue Theorist, etc.[20] This debate will not matter for the purposes of this paper. Whichever theory of morality is true, God will act in a morally perfect manner according to this theory. So, God will always act in a morally perfect manner, but the specifics of this action will change based on which ethical theory turns out to be true. But, whether God is the perfect agent of Kantianism or virtue ethics, on either theory, He will act in a morally perfect manner.

Next, I will justify (4): if it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X), then if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X. In short, if God is in a situation in which there is only one morally perfect action, He must do it. As I argued above, if He is essentially morally perfect, then it is logically impossible for Him to act in a manner that is not morally perfect, meaning that He will always do a morally perfect action. If a given situation contains only one morally perfect action, then God, as a being that only does morally perfect actions, will necessarily do this action. Swinburne confirms this when he says, "if there is a best action, [God] will do it."[21] Many philosophers question the existence of this kind of situation, but most agree that, if a situation with only one morally perfect action existed, then God must do this action when in this situation.

Now, I will justify (5): it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X). In situation Y, a finite number of actions are available to God. Of these possible actions, only one is morally perfect. The remaining possible actions are all either morally neutral or evil. In situation Y, God is confronted with a finite number of possible actions, of which only one qualifies as being morally perfect while the others are either neutral or evil. Situation Y is logically possible. There is no contradiction or violation of a logical law contained within situation Y, meaning that it is logically possible. After all, there are no logical laws that

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20    See Garcia, "Moral Perfection", 221–35.
21    Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 135.

govern whether or not a situation can contain a certain number of morally perfect actions. For the purpose of my argument, situation Y needs only to be logically possible.

One might object that it is not as simple as just stipulating that such a situation exists. But, for the purposes of my argument, such a situation need not exist; situation Y only needs to be logically possible. Since God is a being who is capable of doing all logically possible actions, then all logically possible situations are relevant to assessing the nature of God's freedom. But, one might object that, if God never finds Himself in such a situation, then its logical possibility is irrelevant to the nature of God's freedom, because He will have never been in such a situation and will never have made a decision in it. However, it is not necessary that God actually is in situation Y. We can perform a counterfactual analysis like this: if God were in situation Y, then He would be required to do X. So, even if He is not, in fact, in situation Y, the counterfactual claim can still be true and is still relevant to His general freedom. Furthermore, AP stipulates a necessary condition which must obtain in all situations in which an agent acts freely. As such, if there is a logically possible situation in which an agent would act freely without alternative possibilities, then AP is false. It doesn't matter if the situation in question doesn't actually exist. And, to reiterate, my argument only requires a logically possible situation. AP purports to be a necessary condition of freedom in all logically possible situations. So, if there is one logically possible situation in which AP is false, then AP is false, since it won't hold in all cases, making it no longer a necessary condition of freedom.

From this, (6) follows: if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X [(4), (5)]. Again, given His moral perfection, if there is a singular, morally perfect action, He must necessarily do this action; and, situation Y contains only one morally perfect action, meaning that God must necessarily do this action.

Now, (7): if God must necessarily do action X in situation Y, then God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y. In justification of (7), I offer this argument:

A: if God must necessarily do action X in situation Y, then He could not have done otherwise in situation Y.

B: if He could not have done otherwise in situation Y, then He does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y.

C: thus, if He necessarily must do action X in situation Y, then He does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y.

(6) shows that, in situation Y, God necessarily must do action X. So, from (6) and (7), (8) follows: God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y [(7), (6)].

Next, I will justify (9): if God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities), then alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom. Simply put, if God lacks alternative possibilities in situation Y, and if He still acts freely in this situation, then it follows that He can act freely without having alternative possibilities. If He acts freely without alternative possibilities, then alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom. Again, it does not matter if God is actually in situation Y; so long as Y is logically possible, then it is relevant to God's freedom.

Now, (10): God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities). In this paper, I have assumed the truth of perfect being theology, because my intended audience accepts this view. A central claim of perfect being theology is that God *always* acts freely. Indeed, in a list of five central elements of Western Theism, William Mann includes the belief that "God is perfectly free."[22] Garcia further confirms this when she says that "the claim that God acts freely…holds a central place in theologies which accept an Anselmian understanding of God as the greatest conceivable being."[23] Swinburne echoes this when he says that "God is perfectly free."[24] Essentially, perfect being theologians are deeply committed to the belief that God always acts freely. So, if God acts freely in all situations, then it follows that He must act freely in situation Y, despite not having alternative possibilities.[25] Thus,

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22   William E. Mann, "Divine Sovereignty and Aseity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 36.

23   Laura L. Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 167 (1992): 191.

24   Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 128.

25   It might seem as if I have gone from saying that God always acts freely to saying that He acts freely in all situations. But, there are situations in which it would be logically impossible for Him to be free. So, the following seems more correct: since God always acts freely, then in all situations in which it is logically possible for Him to act freely, He will act freely.

(10) is justified. Now, (11) (thus, alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom) follows from (9) and (10). In short, God lacks alternative possibilities in situation Y, but He still acts freely in this situation, meaning that alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom.

Finally, (12): if alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom, then AP is false. AP states that person S does action A freely only if she "could have done otherwise."[26] On AP, having alternative possibilities is necessary for freedom. So, if having alternative possibilities is not necessary for freedom, then AP is false. From this, (13) follows: thus, AP is false [(12), (11)].

## III. OBJECTIONS:

To review, I have argued that there is a logically possible situation (Y), in which there is only one morally perfect action (X). Given the nature of God's essential moral perfection, He necessarily does action X in situation Y, meaning that He acts without alternative possibilities. However, His action is still free, indicating that AP is false.

I see one main option for the objector: she can argue that, in situation Y, God does have alternative possibilities. If this is true, then it follows that His decision will involve the ability to do otherwise, and situation Y will not constitute a counter-example to AP. In support of her claim that God has alternative possibilities in situation Y, the objector can argue that (1) the other possible actions in situation Y might be legitimate alternative possibilities, (2) inaction is an alternative possibility, (3) possible conjunctions of action X with the morally neutral actions in situation Y create alternative possibilities, and (4) the category of morally indifferent actions offers God an alternative possibility in situation Y. I will respond to each.

After responding to each of these objections, I will address a final objection, which holds that my argument rests on a flawed understanding of God's moral perfection.

*III. 1:*

First, the objector can claim that, in situation Y, both action X (a morally perfect action) and all of the remaining possible actions available in situation

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26   Hunt, "The Simple-Foreknowledge View", 86.

Y are legitimate alternative possibilities for God. Recall that all of the other possible actions in situation Y are either morally neutral or evil and that X is the only morally perfect action in the situation. I have argued that, given God's essentially perfect nature, the morally neutral or evil actions are not legitimate alternative possibilities for Him. But, the objector might question this. She might argue that, although He is morally perfect, God could choose to do something that is not morally perfect. Of course, God never in fact chooses to do something that is not morally perfect, but it might be true that He still could choose to do something that is not morally perfect.[27] Stephen Davis has argued that "if God were unable to do evil then he would not be free."[28] So, if God can do what is evil/not morally perfect (even if He never actually chooses to do so), then the remaining possible actions in situation Y are legitimate alternative possibilities for God. Thus, in situation Y, although God will do action X, He could have done any of the other possible actions, meaning that He does have alternative possibilities in situation Y.[29]

As I understand it, this objection has two parts: (1) the objector argues that, even if God necessarily acts in a morally perfect manner, it does not follow that He lacks the ability to act in a less than perfect manner. In other words, God always does act perfectly, but He retains the ability to act wrongly, even though He never uses this ability. Essentially, just because God always does act perfectly, it does not follow that He must do so. Then, in part (2) the objector argues that this never-actualized/never-used ability gives God alternative possibilities. In other words, if God has the ability to do something less than perfect, even if He never uses this ability, He still has alternative possibilities in the situation that I have imagined, which means that my objection to AP fails. I address parts (1) and (2) of this objection in order.

In response to (1), I argue that, if God is essentially morally perfect, then He lacks the ability to act in a less than morally perfect manner. It is not that God has the ability to do evil but never uses this ability; rather, I argue that He lacks the ability to do anything that is less than morally perfect. If God is

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27    As Morriston, "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?", 152 notes, for the Anselmian, "God may have powers that He does not choose to exercise in any possible world".

28    Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, 212.

29    I am thankful to the anonymous reviewers at *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* for raising this objection with force.

essentially morally perfect, then He always acts in a morally perfect manner. For an object O to possess a property P essentially is for O to instantiate P in all worlds in which O exists. By the definition of necessary existence, a being that exists necessarily exists in all possible worlds. Thus, from the definitions of essential properties and necessary existence, it follows that, if God is necessarily existent and essentially morally perfect (which the perfect-being theologian believes), then God instantiates the property of moral perfection in all possible worlds. If God always instantiates the property of moral perfection, then this means that He always act in a morally perfect manner. In other words, in all possible worlds, God acts morally perfectly, meaning that there is no possible world in which He does not act in a morally perfect manner. Now, we are in a position to see why it follows from God's essential moral perfection that He must act in a morally perfect manner. I take the following as an uncontroversial principle in modal metaphysics: a state of affairs, A, is logically possible IFF there is a logically possible world in which A obtains. If there were no logically possible worlds in which A obtains, then the claim 'A is logically possible' would have no truth-makers. Or, to put the point differently, take the sentence 'it is logically possible that X can do P;' by the same principle, this sentence is true IFF there is a possible world in which X exists and does P. Given all of this, the state of affairs in which God does something less than morally perfect is logically possible IFF there is a possible world in God does something less than morally perfect; and, the sentence 'it is logically possible that God can do something less than morally perfect' is true IFF there is a possible world in which God exists and does something less than morally perfect.[30] However, because God is essentially morally perfect, there is no possible world in which He acts in a less than morally perfect manner. As I have argued, this is what it means to be essentially morally perfect. Given this, we can see that there is an incompatibility between God's essential moral

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30    Morriston agrees with this analysis; as he says, "if a person P possesses this two-way power [i.e. freedom] with regard to an act A at a time t, then as things are at t, it must be possible for P to exercise this power by doing, or by refraining from doing, A at t. If this is right, then it follows that one necessary condition of P's having the power to do A at t is that it is possible that P does A at t. In the language of possible worlds, there must be at least one possible world in which P does A at t" Morriston, "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?", 144. Thus, on Morriston's view, if God has the power to do evil, then there must be at least one possible world in which He does an evil act.

perfection and His ability to choose to do evil (or something that is less than morally perfect). If He is essentially morally perfect, then He cannot choose to do something that is morally imperfect; and, if He can choose to do something that is morally imperfect, then He is not essentially morally perfect. Again, if God could choose to do something that is morally imperfect, there would have to be a possible world in which He does choose something morally imperfect; but, if He is essentially morally perfect, then there is no such world. Thus, it is logically impossible for God to act in a less than morally perfect manner. Again, for a state of affairs, A, to be logically possible, there must be a possible world in which A obtains. And, if God is essentially morally perfect, there are no possible worlds in which He does not act morally perfectly. Thus, the state of affairs in which He does not act morally perfectly is logically impossible.

In part (2) of this objection, the objector argues that, because God can choose to do something morally imperfect, He has alternative possibilities, even if He never uses them. However, if (as I argued above) it is logically impossible for God to do something morally imperfect, then morally imperfect actions fail to provide Him with genuine alternative possibilities. The following seems like an intuitive principle for identifying which actions do not qualify as alternative possibilities for action: if action X is logically impossible for agent S, then X is not a legitimate alternative possibility for S. For example, I cannot make 2 and 2 equal 5; thus, it is clear that this action is not a legitimate alternative possibility for me. After all, it seems false to say that actions which are logically impossible (i.e. actions which an agent cannot do in any possible world) could qualify as legitimate alternative possibilities for an agent. Because acting in a non-morally perfect manner is logically impossible for God, it does not constitute a genuine alternative possibility for Him.[31]

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31    I am assuming that God's omnipotence does not allow Him to do logically impossible actions. Furthermore, my argument relies on an account of omnipotence very similar to that defended by Wieranga, which holds that an omnipotent being cannot do anything that is incompatible with its essential properties. As Wieranga, *The Nature of God* puts it, "an omnipotent being need not be able to do anything incompatible with its having the essential properties it has" (16-17). Or, as Morriston summarizes Wieranga's view, "if x's nature or essence includes moral perfection, then it is not possible at any time that x actualizes any evil state of affairs unless it has a morally sufficient reason for doing so…so, where x=God, the fact that x cannot actualize E [a state of affairs that is inconsistent with God's moral perfection] does not count against the claim that x is omnipotent" (147). Morriston finds this account of omnipotence to

But, to make sure that I have been charitable to the objector, I will consider a further objection. The objector might respond that, if God has the ability to do something that is less than morally perfect, then there does not need to be a possible world in which He does something that is not morally perfect. Rather, the objector might claim that God still has the ability to do something morally imperfect, even if He never uses this ability in any logically possible world. To put the point more abstractly, God has the ability to do X, even if He never does X in any logically possible worlds.

I have several responses to this objection. First, I argue that it rests on an implausible principle about modality. Take the sentence 'it is logically possible that X can do P.' On the view just described, this claim can be true even if there is no logically possible world in which X exists and does P. This prompts the question: if this sentence can be true even if there is no logically possible world in which it obtains, then what makes it true? Clearly, this sentence is not analytically true. Thus, something beyond the meanings of the terms must make it true. Upon reflection, I cannot conceive of what can make a non-analytic modal claim true other than a possible world in which the content of the statement obtains. If propositions are true in virtue of referring to something, then this proposition must refer to something that makes it true. Other than a possible world in which this statement's content obtains, I cannot conceive of something else to which it might refer. Thus, if one is to claim that a non-analytic modal statement can be true without referring to a possible world in which its content obtains, then one must hold that non-analytic modal statements can be true without referring to anything and without having any truth-makers. This position, I argue, is implausible. Thus, this objection rests on an implausible principle about modality.

Second, I respond to this objection by noting that the conception of modality used in my argument is highly intuitive; my claim is only that the sen-

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be unsatisfactory (see 146-148). It is beyond the scope of this paper to launch a defense of this view of omnipotence; as such, I must take it as given that this is a plausible notion of omnipotence. After all, this account of omnipotence holds that God cannot act in ways that conflict with His essential properties, which seems to be another way of saying that God cannot do what is logically impossible. As I have argued, if God possesses a property P essentially, then He has P in all possible worlds, which means that it is logically impossible for Him to not possess P. Thus, to say that God cannot do anything which conflicts with His essential properties is simply to say that He cannot do anything logically impossible, because it would be logically impossible for Him to not instantiate His essential properties.

tence, 'it is logically possible for God to do something that is morally imperfect' is true IFF there is a possible world in which God does something that is morally imperfect. Furthermore, I note that it is not the goal my paper to settle a highly technical debate in modal metaphysics. I am willing to grant that my argument only succeeds if my view about modality is true. But, to launch a full defense of this conception of modality would require more space than this paper has, and it would distract from the overall goal of my argument.

## III. 2:

Second, the objector might claim that inaction (i.e. doing neither action X nor any other action in situation Y) constitutes an alternative possibility in situation Y. Essentially, the objector argues that, in situation Y, God can choose to do none of the possible actions, and this inaction constitutes a legitimate alternative possibility. This means that God's decision to do X is one made in the presence of alternative possibilities.

This objection fails to understand that inaction can be morally evaluated. I consider inaction to be a kind of action, in that we evaluate it as being moral or immoral. For example, we would say that choosing not to save a drowning child who could easily have been saved is a not a morally perfect action. So, inaction can be evaluated as an action. In a given situation, inaction, since it can be morally evaluated, will either be morally perfect or not morally perfect. Depending on the context of the situation, inaction will vary in its moral status. In the case of not saving a drowning child, inaction is clearly not a morally perfect action. But, there can easily be cases in which inaction is a morally perfect action. In situation Y, the moral status of inaction will depend on the specific context of situation Y, which I have intentionally not stipulated. But, if inaction turns out to be the one morally perfect action in situation Y, then it fails to be a legitimate alternative possibility for God, because it just is the very action to which the objector wants to add an alternative possibility. And, if inaction turns out to be either morally neutral or evil in situation Y, then it is already accounted for as an action that fails to be morally perfect, which, as I argued above, cannot count as a legitimate alternative possibility for God. Thus, inaction fails to solve the problem.

*III. 3:*

Third, the objector can argue that, even though God necessarily does action X in situation Y, He still has alternative possibilities, in that He can choose to conjunct any of the additional morally neutral actions in situation Y onto His decision to do action X. For example, suppose that, of the finite number of possible actions in situation Y, ten of them are morally neutral. Let's refer to these actions with the first ten letters of the alphabet. God can choose to do action X combined with any of these ten different actions. He can choose to action X while simultaneously doing action A. Or, he can choose to do X while simultaneously doing action B. And so on. Each of these different conjunctions of actions can count as legitimate alternative possibilities for God. After all, He is still doing the one morally perfect action, but He is just adding different morally neutral actions to it.

Although this objection is the most worrisome of the lot, there is a simple solution. It can just be added into situation Y that all of the possible actions are logically incompatible with each other. In other words, all of the possible actions in situation Y are such that, if God does any one of them, it is logically impossible for Him to do any of the others. If this is the case, then God choosing to do action X entails that He can't do the other actions and vice versa. This move may seem ad hoc, but it is not. As I stated earlier, situation Y need only be logically possible. And, the stipulation that all of the possible actions in situation Y are logically mutually exclusive doesn't make situation Y logically impossible. Furthermore, it is not at all strange to say that situations involving moral decision making involve mutually exclusive actions. For example, if I decide to save the life of a drowning child, this is logically incompatible with my possible decision to not save the child.

But, if this response is unsatisfactory, we can always alter situation Y so that the only other possible actions apart from the singular morally perfect action are all evil actions. If we made this alteration to situation Y, then God could not conjunct the remaining possible actions with action X, because all of the remaining possible actions would be evil actions, which He cannot do. Again, this may seem like an ad hoc stipulation. But, this stipulation does not render situation Y logically impossible, and the logical possibility of situation Y is all that is needed for my argument.

*III. 4:*

Finally, in support of her claim that God has alternative possibilities in situation Y, the objector can argue that the morally neutral actions in situation Y constitute legitimate alternative possibilities for God. Doing a morally neutral action seemingly has no bearing on God's moral perfection. For example, suppose that God could put one more rock on a distant planet whose orbital behaviors will have no effect on humans. God's decision between putting no additional rocks on this planet and putting one additional rock on this planet seems to have no bearing on His moral perfection. This is the case, because both of these actions are morally neutral. So, argues the objector, the morally neutral possible actions in situation Y constitute legitimate alternative possibilities for God.

I will grant that, in a situation in which only morally neutral options are available to God, such as the one just described, then it is not in conflict with His moral perfection for Him to do a morally neutral action. But, suppose that we add a morally perfect action into the above planet situation; and, further suppose that all of the actions in this situation are mutually exclusive. In this case, it seems that God cannot do the morally neutral action. In other words, in a situation in which God has to choose, due to the mutual exclusivity of the options, between doing a morally perfect action or a morally neutral action, He must do the morally perfect action. Doing a morally neutral action to the exclusion of a morally perfect action seems to conflict with God's moral perfection. This means that the morally neutral actions in situation Y fail to constitute genuine alternative possibilities.

Again, if this response is unsatisfactory, the morally neutral actions can, as was just described in the response to the above objection, be removed from situation Y so that it only contains evil actions and one morally perfect action.

*III. 5:*

Finally, one might object that the notion of moral perfection that I have used in this paper is fundamentally flawed. The objector might argue that I have been unclear about whether moral perfection requires (1) that God always does the *maximally* perfect action in a given situation or (2) that God always does an action that is morally perfect but not necessarily the maximally perfect action. It seems clear that there is a gradient of moral perfection. By this, I mean that, of the set of morally perfect actions, some will be better than oth-

ers. The first view above holds that, if faced with multiple morally perfect actions in a given situation, God must do the action is that is most perfect. The second view claims that, in such a situation, so long as His action is within the category of 'morally perfect,' God is free to choose between the different morally perfect options and need not pick the maximally perfect action. Although this is an important distinction, it has no bearing on my argument. The situation that I have presented (situation Y) is one in which there is only one morally perfect action. The difference between the two views above only arises in situations in which there are multiple morally perfect actions available to God. Since situation Y does not involve multiple morally perfect actions from which God must choose, there is no need for me to assume either view 1 or 2 about moral perfection. Both views would surely say that, if faced with a situation in which there is only one morally perfect action, God must do this action. The debate between these views only arises when the situation in question contains multiple morally perfect actions. Thus, this objection does not actually address the argument made in my paper.

## IV. CONCLUSION:

In sum, I argue that there is a logically possible situation in which God lacks alternative possibilities but in which He still acts freely. As I have stated previously, this argument will only be threatening to those who endorse both AP and perfect being theology. I believe that I have shown that there is a fundamental tension between perfect being theology and AP, such that one cannot rationally believe in the truth of both. Thus, as long as the perfect being theologian wants to maintain her commitment to perfect being theology, then she cannot believe in the truth of AP. Of course, it is possible for a perfect being theologian to be so strongly committed to AP that she takes my argument as sufficient reason to abandon perfect being theology, and this would be a consistent view to endorse. But, those perfect being theologians who are more committed to perfect being theology than they are to AP must accept that there is a logically possible situation in which God acts freely and yet lacks alternative possibilities. From this, it follows that the perfect being theologian must believe that AP is false.

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# ANALOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DIVINE CAUSALITY IN THOMAS AQUINAS

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**Abstract.** The article presents the question of understanding divine causality and its analogical character in the context of Thomas Aquinas's teaching on Divine Providence. Analyzing Aquinas's texts concerning the relation of God's action towards nature and its activities it is necessary to emphasize the proper understanding of mutual relations between secondary causes and the primary cause which are not on the same level. Influenced by the reflection of M. Dodds OP and I. Silva, the author of the article refers to Aquinas's biblical commentaries which have not been discussed so far from the perspective of the character of God's action. In the final part of the article, metaphors used by Thomas in reference to the relation of God towards the world will be presented.

Among some researchers who investigate the mode of God's action in the world and try to include it into the achievement of natural science, there have been recently some significant references to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).[1] It still draws our attention that Aristotelian tradition adopted and enriched by Thomas Aquinas, seems to be a useful tool in building models of the philosophical worldview where God's action is seen as possible. Perhaps for this reason, the authors from the analytic tradition have recently evoked thoughts of Aquinas on several specific issues in philosophical theology.[2] In this paper, I would like to present a specific question of Divine Providence in Aquinas as a starting point for analytic reflection. Having defined the goals, I divided my paper into two main parts. In the first one, I shortly characterize Aquinas's teaching on Providence, the relationship between God's action and action of the nature that He created. In the second part, I present some examples of

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1   See Dodds (2012), Casadesus (2014), Tabaczek (2015).
2   See di Ceglie (2015). See also Silva (2016: 65-84).

metaphors that Aquinas uses for describing how God providently acts in the world. This special way of speaking about God and His action requires attention in order to clarify its meaning.

## 1. THE CONCEPT OF PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN AQUINAS'S PHILOSOPHY

The topic of Providence is essential for Aquinas's thinking about God and his attitude toward the world. Trying to present his thought accurately, we need to note and compare his doctrine of Providence in different works written at different stages of his academic career. It is interesting that Aquinas expresses his reflection about Providence not only in his systematic works (i.e. commentary on the 'Sentences' of Peter Lombard, *De Veritate*, the *Summa contra Gentiles* or the *Summa Theologiae*), but also in his biblical commentaries (particularly in the commentary on Job). What is predominant in all of his writings is a conviction about the universal character of Providence. Nevertheless, the mode God's Providence is exercised is not the same in all cases, but depends on the nature of each being. None of entities, contingent or not, can escape it. Yet in *De Veritate* Thomas observes that the closer created beings are to the first cause as *primo principio*, the more noble is their collocation within the order of God's Providence.[3] That's why the main task of philosophy, as Aquinas suggests, consists in trying to discover and comprehend the secrets of the first cause: *investigare autem secreta primae causae maximum est.*[4]

In recent years, there have appeared many publications presenting the actuality of the philosophical thought of Aquinas concerning the description of the nature of God's action in the world, just to mention studies of Ignacio Silva or Michael Dodds OP. The field of reflection has increased significantly thanks to the recent scientific discoveries and profound debates on determinism/indeterminism which were reactivated when the Uncertainty Principle of Heisenberg was declared.[5]

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3   *De Veritate*, q.5, a.5c: 'Quanto aliquid est propinquius primo principio, tanto nobilius sub ordine providentiae collocatur'.
4   *In Eph.*, cap. III, lect. 2.
5   Dodds (2012: 205) says that contemporary 'science is breaking out of the confines of causality as understood by Newtonian physics (…) Newtonian causality was univocal, the force

In this context, the question arises what to think about Providence which governs the world and how to perceive the reference between operations of nature and God. In this analysis, I focus mainly on trying to understand how God acts in the nature, the models of which Aquinas proposes to explain and how to think about Providence in the perspective of the relationship between the primary cause and secondary causes.

### 1.1. Providence as ordinare in finem

Aquinas distinguishes Providence understood as *ratio ordinis rerum in finem* from the government of God over the universe (*executio*), it means realization of this order. Behind this distinction we can recognize Aquinas's conviction that the world is ordered, although the intention of this order *(ratio ordinis)* is not always known by men, particularly in reference to these beings that possess free will. Good or bad things happen to both, good and bad people (Brague 2013).[6] But God knows this *ratio ordinis*: like a doctor who knows when he should apply the appropriate medicine, sometimes sweet, another time bitter. Thomas Aquinas understands this *ratio ordinis*, located in the mind of God, as an idea or plan to carry things to their purpose.[7]

But Aquinas knows that sometimes this *ordo* in the world is not perceptible. Some kind of disorder (*inordinatio*) — as Thomas explains — in perception of God's reason ordering all in the world is not referring to this good to which man goes *per se*, but to those which are joined to them: a good act has always a reward of perfect virtue (which is a *bonum humanum*, human good) and happiness.[8] At this particular level - *permixtio* - the wrong perception of Providence may take place.

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that moved the atoms. Contemporary causality is analogous, expressed in many different ways in the various sciences. Analogy is also essential in our language about God. If we speak of God univocally, we reduce God to the level of a creature. By speaking analogously, we preserve both the reality of God and the integrity of creature.'

6    The experience of providence is one of the important sources of sense for man. For R. Brague, the contemporary postmodern context, which is a self-retreat from the project of the Enlightenment, is a sign that we are entering a new Middle Ages.

7    *S. Th.*, I, q.22, a.1c.

8    *In I Sent.*, d. 39 q. 2 a. 2 ad 5: 'Sicut medicus scit quare quibusdam aegris quandoque det calida et quandoque frigida, et similiter sanis; quod tamen ignorans artem admiratur, ut dicit Boetius. Ista tamen inordinatio si diligenter advertitur, invenitur non in his ad quae per se ordinatur humana opera, et quae per se sunt tantum bona vel mala. Habet enim bonum opus semper sibi adjunctum bonitatis praemium in perfectione virtutis, quae est bonum humanum,

Every providential action of God has this double characteristic: on the one hand, it is *dispositio*, which is a work of divine intelligence, and on the other hand, implementation of what is planned and what belongs to the will of God.[9] The fundamental issue that Thomas discusses each time, while considering Providence, is the question of 'how' God carries out this order. This is essentially a question of the *principium providentiae*, and this is good only. It is worth noting that good is the way in which God runs the world[10] and it is best expressed by the order of His Providence.[11]

Providence in Thomistic perspective is characterized by directness and includes all beings, even the least significant. In contrast, governing the world is not executed directly, but by means of secondary causes. Everything that has been created is subjected to Divine Providence, which is mainly related to two attributes: the wisdom and power.[12] As we can see, for Aquinas the perspective of the debate on Providence is twofold: *providentia* is applied both to general and particular order of things, *in universali* and *in singulari*. Accord-

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et in consecutione beatitudinis, ad quam opera humana ordinantur; et e contrario est de malis. Sed ista permixtio videtur accidere in his bonis quae extra hominem sunt, vel quae non sunt bona ejus inquantum est homo, sicut in bonis corporalibus et in bonis fortunae; cum tamen ista permixtio semper ordinetur ad id quod est per se hominis bonum, vel gratiae, vel gloriae, secundum apostolum Rom. 8, 28: *diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum*, vel in justitiae divinae manifestationem; frequenter enim impii prosperantur in hac vita, ut manifestior appareat in judicio eorum animadversio'.

9    *ScG*, III, cap. 71.

10    *De Veritate*, q. 5 a. 1 ad s.c. 3. 'Ad tertium dicendum, quod Deus dicitur gubernare per bonitatem, non quasi bonitas sit ipsa providentia, sed quia est providentiae principium, cum habeat rationem finis; et etiam quia ita se habet divina bonitas ad ipsum sicut moralis virtus ad nos'.

11    *ScG* III, cap. 64: 'the ultimate end of the divine will is His goodness, and the nearest thing to this latter, among created things, is the good of the order of the whole universe, since every particular good of this or that thing is ordered to it as to an end (just as the less perfect is ordered to what is more perfect); and so, each part is found to be for the sake of its whole. Thus, among created things, what God cares for most is the order of the universe.'

12    See te Velde (2013: 51): The Providence is the manifestation of divine reason and wisdom. As authors observer the structure of Aquinas's reflection in Summa contra Gentiles is based on the analysis of relationship of Greek (and Arabic) necessitarianism and Christian doctrine of freedom, which decides about the human free agency. According to te Velde, 'freedom is included under the universal order of God's providence, because God not only concerns the effect, but also the way — in this case, a free way — in which this effect is realized by the secondary cause. Freedom is not "outside" of the regimen of providence' (p. 60). See ScG, III, c.94: *sic enim sunt a Deo proviso ut per nos libere fiant*; see also S. Ausin (1976: 477-550).

ing to him the contingency, free will, fortune and chance are 'dimension' (or framework), through which providence acts.[13]

The presence of the universal cause is not 'overwhelming' the particular causes, but is most intimate in it.[14] Combining Providence with secondary causes: what models do we have at our disposal? A debate on this subject has been in progress for some time and many attempts have been made to provide solutions to the question of divine action in relation to the creation. It has been understood according to the principle of instrumental causality; as an axe in a hand of a lumberjack so God works through His creation.

Thomas Tracy (Tracy 1994) analyzes different variants of this model: it is possible that causes act together in the same way as we can touch together one string, the second model is acting 'on behalf of' someone greater (a herald acts on behalf of his ruler and similarly the creation acts on behalf of God); the third option focuses on divine action in the form of encouragement, persuasion, in order to encourage the other one — the secondary causes — to act. Tracy's manner of thinking and suggested models have numerous limits and might give rise to concern. They all assume that divine action limits the freedom of an agent. But is it not a trap of univocal language which pushes God only into one meaning which is hidden behind our own basic categories of explication? To some extent, this equalisation of the perspectives of God and the creation is the heritage of some kind of natural theology which building rational explanation of the world has to define God and the creation according to the same system of principles. Tracy's models are characterized by reductionism which places God on the same footing as homogenous causes.

It is clearly visible that the most significant question is understanding of an analogical manner of divine causality which is neither in conflict with the creation nor replaces it. However, the mode of thinking which might be called 'Promethean' is different. It has been culturally present since ancient times and proclaims that the more of God, the fewer of man. Aquinas's thinking is radically different. In order to understand it, it is necessary to take into consideration a separate nature of two orders: particular and universal, but it is not everything. God cannot be perceived as the One who influences this system 'from outside'. Rudi te Velde emphasized it in one of his essays saying

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13   Elders 2013.
14   Durand 2014.

that '[f]or Thomas, an absolute power is not a power which does not tolerate any other power besides itself; "absolute" means that I can cause something else to be and to act by its own power.'[15] Understanding these challenges Eleonore Stump in her monograph entitled *Aquinas* (Stump 2003: 300) referred to the theme of relation between divine action and created causality. For her, a good framework to solve this question is a reference of divine grace to human freedom. It demands preservation of the priority of ontological grace, on the one hand, and libertarian freedom of the created cause, on the other hand. A solution is to perceive divine action as a formal cause, a specific habitus (*donum habituale)* which enables man to receive grace.[16]

First, it is worth concentrating on what an analogical mode of perceiving divine causality means.

### 1.2 Analogical character of divine causality

When we ask how God acts, in which manner He is seen as a cause for Aquinas, there is no doubt that He cannot be equated with the causation's mode appropriate to creatures. God is not one of the many others among natural causes, it is not possible to set Him in the same line. Thomas repeatedly emphasizes the transcendence of God over creation, which cannot easily be reconciled with the fact that he would be forced to supplement the impotence of natural causes. At this point it is important to clarify, following I. Silva, how to understand the natural causes. Natural agents belong to the fabric of nature and have natural causal powers. Finding a space for God in this world - as Russell states - means, however, that God's action is limited to interacting within the created world, and loses His providential (*ordinare in finem*) power, because 'it does not seem clear how one of many causes may direct the world created as such to his purpose, especially if we think of humanity'.[17]

God and natural causes operate on different levels, a result which originates from their interaction, and cannot be divided in such a way that 'the part' of the action is on God's side, and other on the side of nature. It should rather be seen holistically at the effect of dual action of God and natural causes. Aquinas expresses this thinking in the *Summa Theologiae:* 'Because in all

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15    te Velde (2013: 53).
16    Rooney (2015: 711-721).
17    Silva (2013: 413).

things God himself is properly the cause of universal being which is inner-most in all things, it follows that in all things God works intimately.'[18]

Some philosophers of religion call it the paradox of 'double agency', follow-ing the observation of Anglican theologian, Austin Farrer.[19] In order to under-stand how God acts and what His analogical causality denotes Farrer's designa-tion refers to Christian understanding of grace 'as a clue to the way God acts throughout the created order'.[20] In this context a mystery of Incarnation acquires a special meaning as it recognises a complex way of understanding and naming the cooperation of divinity and humanity in the form of the Word Incarnate. 'The grid of causal uniformity does not (to any evidence) fit so tight upon natural processes as to bar the influence of an over-riding divine persuasion.' Something similar occurs in the case of musical interpretation: the interpreters of music are both musicians performing on instruments and the symphony conductor. In some respects, they are all authors. It is a sign of the providential action of God: God maintains the relationship with the created causes in a completely different way than they maintain to each other. To understand this, a prior reflection on the ontological status of God and creation is required.

Aquinas uses not a univocal, but analogical comprehension of causal-ity in the case of God and, that's why, he is able to manifest precisely, meta-physically the different characteristics of God's causality in comparison to creatural causality.[21] Therefore, in his book *The Mind and Universe,* Mariano Artigas, an eminent philosopher of science, starts his chapter devoted to the ways of divine action in the world with this question. Reflecting on the ways of divine action Artigas observes that 'divine and natural causality must have something in common, insofar as in both cases we are dealing with causes that produce effects. In this context, analogy means that we apply the concept of cause both to God and to creatures, partly in the same way and partly in a different way'.[22]

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18   *S.Th.* I, 105, 5c: 'et ipse Deus est proprie causa ipsius esse universalis in rebus omnibus, quod inter omnia est magis intimum rebus; sequitur quod Deus in omnibus intime operetur'. In this article Aquinas speaks about *ordo secundarum causarum* and analyzes how is the rela-tion of God towards this causes. See also *Compendium theologiae*, lib. 1 cap. 136 co.
19   Farrer (1967: 173).
20   Hebblethwaite (2012: 141).
21   White (2015: 188-193).
22   Artigas (2001: 145).

In his recent book, Dodds considers this analogical understanding of God's causality as a very important condition for the right comprehension of Aquinas's teaching about Providence: 'As a univocal cause, God will necessarily interfere with the causality of creatures if God acts in the world. When two univocal causes are involved in one action, the causality of one must necessarily diminish that of the other.'[23] This is a famous 'causal join': the point where God's causality intersects with that of creatures. The term was introduced by Austin Farrer, who indicates that this point must remain a mystery. The reason of the crisis in the notion of divine action is a consequence of narrowing the understanding of causality which appears with the modern science. It appears here what Dodds called 'theophysical incompatibilism'. In a world described only through the mechanistic reductionism, God cannot work with other causes: there is no place for Him. But it is not a problem of causality itself, rather our perception of it, so it always happens when we ontologically unify the Creator and creatures.

In Aquinas's philosophy, God's action does not mean exterior manipulation of creatural being: God acts in constitutive manner, non-controlling or non-compelling. God makes that a cause is a cause and for this reason He is the source of its power of causality. To understand this doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, one should remember that God and His action are inseparable: God is whole in His action. Therefore, in order to understand how God providently acts, it is recommended to return to Aquinas's thinking about the nature of theological language: in what terms — analogical or univocal — we speak about God and we express His mystery. As creatures, we never escape from our, appropriate to human intelligence, *modus significandi*.[24] And therefore we have to remember that we depend on analogical language. It results from the fact that although we can use non-divine words to express what is divine we may not understand who God is. God cannot be defined entirely by any function, which Thomas Aquinas was aware of.

Analogical language refers to the lack of complete translatability of terms when it comes to a new discovery. It is something more than a metaphor as it establishes a relationship between what is already known and yet unknown

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23    Dodds (2012).
24    Rocca (2004: 109) says: 'Contemporary science is now emerging from the narrow causal paradigm of Newtonian science, but much of theology is still trapped in them.'

introducing proportion. As Castro observes, analogy is not limited to a pure negativity because it has veritative aspirations: 'it is not reduced to the three unities as one term is unknown and the other includes infinity. But we can understand what we say when we state that 3 is to 5 as x is to infinity although we cannot adjudicate the relationship of x to infinity. Undoubtedly, analogy supplies us with certain knowledge.' (Castro 2012: 120) Analogical character of language is a feature of natural language to refer to new meanings and create, at the same time, a conceptual network which opens new possibilities. When someone discovers something new they attempt to refer to what is already known and build a new meaning.

From the perspective of Thomas Aquinas analogical understanding of divine causality means that God does not act like one of the many causes.[25] On the contrary, this term — analogical — describes the unique relationship between Creator and creature, which gives the existence to the created being and enables it to act. Precisely, basing the action of Providence on the secondary causes is not a sign of weakness, but the opportunity for the creatures to be a real causes, stemming from the love of God and contributing to His greater glory.[26] Aquinas explained it in a commentary to one of the psalms (and therefore in his last work), referring to the idea of movement, so characteristic for the wisdom of God which in this manner performs the task of *ministerio spiritualis creaturae*.[27]

### 1.3 Primary and secondary causes: levels of divine action according to Aquinas

Thus, the causality of God extends not only to the way in which the operating beings cause, but to each being as such, in its distinctiveness and uniqueness. This is a consequence of Thomas's doctrine of creation, according to which God not only creates a general order of the world, but also its particularity. While creating beings, God at the same time creates their actions, so we can say He acts providentially through the causality of created beings. The

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25   See Silva (2014: 277-291).

26   ScG II, cap. 25: 'Deus, qui est institutor naturae, non subtrahit rebus id quod est proprium naturis earum'.

27   *In Ps.* 17, n. 8: 'Divina autem sapientia moveri dicitur, inquantum motum causat in mobilia. Quidquid autem causat Deus in istis inferioribus, causat ministerio spiritualis creaturae: unde dicit Augustinus quod Deus movet corporalem creaturam mediante spirituali: sed non facit hoc sua virtute spiritualis creatura, sed Deo praesidente. Et dicitur hoc specialiter facere Cherubin, quia interpretatur plenitudo scientiae: et Deus omnia per suam scientiam facit'.

fact that some beings are causes of good for others is an expression of God's goodness and it emphasizes that God not only creates their existence, but also their power of causation. This point is explained in the significant passage of the *Summa Theologiae*:

> But since things which are governed should be brought to perfection by government, this government will be so much the better in the degree the things governed are brought to perfection. Now it is a greater perfection for a thing to be good in itself and also the cause of goodness in others, than only to be good in itself. Therefore God so governs things that He makes some of them to be causes of others in government; as a master, who not only imparts knowledge to his pupils, but gives also the faculty of teaching others.[28]

The key question is how it is done. For understanding this, Thomas analyzes in the pages of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* four different ways or models whereby God's action can be related to the natural causes. Silva calls first two static, while the other two dynamic.[29] In the first model, it is possible to attribute to God the effects of an action of natural agent due to the fact that God is the cause of the causal power of being. God is the creator of everything that exists - including this power of causation, which is characteristic for beings. The second aspect is sustaining in existence of these abilities of natural agent to act - the distinction extremely important for Aquinas, constituting the crucial point of his teachings about the *creatio continua*, and based on the distinction between the act of creation (*creatio*) and sustaining beings in existence (*conservatio*).[30]

Another two modes of God's action in and through natural causes refer not so much to the efficient causality, but its particular case, which is an instrumental causality. For Thomas, each being as instrument has two main activities: one in accordance with its own nature and the other one which goes beyond. This distinction helps Aquinas to depict two successive modes of God's action.

In the third model, Aquinas thinks about situation in which a being acting naturally is moved to action by another: an example might be a person

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28    *S. Th.*, I, q.103, a.6c.
29    Silva (2013a: 658-667). I am in debt to Silva and his analysis of the doctrine of Providence in the Summa *contra Gentiles* of Aquinas and in this part I follow his observation based on Aquinas's texts.
30    Roszak (2011: 169-184).

who uses a knife, and causes it to cut. Knife's power of cutting was applied by a man through the movement of the knife. In the fourth case, Aquinas is referring to activities that exceed the capacity of secondary causes, which take place in the case of causation of existence that escapes natural competence. They can create life only through participation — which is a category important for our theme — in the power of the first efficient cause. Therefore, God is the cause of this action, and a natural being is an instrument under God's action causing the existence. Neither in the first nor in the second case, action of natural agent can take place without the action of the first cause, and therefore the effects of this action can be applied to both. Without a man, a knife would not cut anything, and the excision of specific shapes or forms exceeds its natural capabilities. For this reason, Thomas Aquinas in *De Veritate* in this manner captures the interaction of the first and secondary causes: *effectus non sequitur ex causa prima, nisi posita causa secunda*.[31] On account of this, each time a natural agent acts, it carries out the plan of Providence and, that's why, every natural action may be related to God. For the same reason, Aquinas rejects occasionalism, understood as a view arguing for full divine responsibility for the causality of secondary causes, where God appears to be a sufficient cause of the effects. Thomas indicates that the nature needs God's power to work: there are no 'gaps' in which God would not act, but it does not mean that God acts 'in place of His creation'. As Silva summarizes: 'God gives the power, sustains the power, the power applies this cause, and achieves effects that go beyond this natural power He applies.'[32]

God's causation, however, does not remove the contingency of action and power to natural agents.[33] An interesting example could be Aquinas's distinction between events taking place in the majority of cases (*ut in pluribus*), and these that occurred in a few cases (*ut in paucioribus*).[34] It means derogation from the rules that usually take place in the operation of natural causes.[35] As

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31   *De Veritate,* q.5, a.9, ad 12.

32   See Silva (2013a: 665).

33   See Andrews (2015: 1-12).

34   More about this distinction in Aquinas, see: Silva (2013b), Minecam (2017: 31-51).

35   *S.Th.*, I, q.23, a.7, ad 3: 'The good that is proportionate to the common state of nature is to be found in the majority; and is wanting in the minority. The good that exceeds the common state of nature is to be found in the minority, and is wanting in the majority. Thus it is clear that the majority of men have a sufficient knowledge for the guidance of life; and those who have not this knowledge are said to be half-witted or foolish; but they who attain to a profound

Thomas specifies in one of the chapters in *Summa Against the Gentiles*, such deficiencies can occur for three reasons:

> For the order imposed on things by God is based on what usually occurs, in most cases, in things, but not on what is always so. In fact, many natural causes produce their effects in the same way, but not always. Sometimes, indeed, though rarely, an event occurs in a different way, either due to a defect in the power of an agent (1), or to the unsuitable condition of the matter (2), or to an agent with greater strength—as when nature gives rise to a sixth finger on a man (3). But the order of providence does not fail, or suffer change, because of such an event. Indeed, the very fact that the natural order, which is based on things that happen in most cases, does fail at times is subject to divine providence. (…) divine power can sometimes produce an effect, without prejudice to its providence, apart from the order implanted in natural things by God. In fact, He does this at times to manifest His power.[36]

God in His creative action acts through secondary causes, even when they run out of their normal course of events, of their natural tendency to act in a particular way.[37] In such cases, God realizes His Providence as well, which refers to each being acting naturally in two dimensions: its ordering with respect to Himself and to something different from Him. Therefore, although the tendency or intention of a being acting naturally does not extend to an indeterminate result, it is God's intention which is extended to the effect that exceeds the possibility of a natural being. As the result, to find God's action in the world one does not have to look for 'places' where nature does not work (which is the core of the argument God of the gaps[38]). Nevertheless, the fact that some natural events are not determined can be an argument for crea-tion's perfection. The chance, therefore, plays an integral role in Aquinas's un-

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knowledge of things intelligible are a very small minority in respect to the rest. Since their eternal happiness, consisting in the vision of God, exceeds the common state of nature, and especially in so far as this is deprived of grace through the corruption of original sin, those who are saved are in the minority. In this especially, however, appears the mercy of God, that He has chosen some for that salvation, from which very many in accordance with the common course and tendency of nature fall short.'

36    *ScG*, III, cap. 99.

37    See *In I Cor.*, cap. XII, lect. 1: 'Unde subdit idem vero Deus, qui operatur omnia, sicut prima causa creans omnes operationes. Ne tamen aliae causae videantur esse superfluae sub-dit in omnibus, quia in causis secundariis prima causa operatur. Isa. XXVI, 12: omnia opera nostra operatus es in nobis'.

38    Oleksowicz (2014: 99-124).

derstanding of the nature.[39] Thomas states that the contingency of the world is required by God's Providence and it is the sign of the greater perfection of the world.[40] Aquinas explains that in the *Summa Theologiae*:

> For to providence it belongs to order things towards an end. Now after the divine goodness, which is an extrinsic end to all things, the principal good in things themselves is the perfection of the universe; which would not be, were not all grades of being found in things. Whence it pertains to divine providence to produce every grade of being. And thus it has prepared for some things necessary causes, so that they happen of necessity; for others contingent causes, that they may happen by contingency, according to the nature of their proximate causes.[41]

Thomas sees that God is not constantly using the same way. God sets a balance between the events happening by chance and the ones proceeding from a natural tendency.[42] In this sense, it should be noted that chance is a part of God's *ordinatio*: 'It is necessary that the entire work (*operatio*) of nature be ordered from some knowledge and this certainly must be reduced to God in an immediate or mediate way.'[43] God is not only responsible for the ordering of means to the end, but He is also responsible for the ordering of universe. The activity of the secondary causes, including contingent ones, does not turn against the governance of Providence, but bespeaks of greater wisdom on part of the governor.[44]

Aquinas writes about it clearly in his commentary on the Book of Job which, as it is known, presents the mystery of Divine Providence in the context of reflection on the presence of evil in human life and the existence of chance.[45] He emphasizes the necessity of remembering the difference between causality of secondary causes and the power of the First Cause which requires careful thinking when applying philosophical categories which describe it. Aquinas notices that

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39   *In Matt.*, cap. II, lect. 1: 'Nota ergo quod videmus multa in rebus humanis per accidens et casualiter accidere…'.
40   See Sanguineti (2013: 387-403).
41   *S.Th.*, I, q.22, a.4c.
42   See Hilaire (2015: 113-131).
43   *ScG* III, 64.
44   See Bonino(2010: 493-519); Conrad (2014: 167-205).
45   Nutt (2015: 44-66).

we fail to understand divine things in two ways. First, because as we cannot know 'the invisible things of God' except through 'things which have been created' (Rom. 1:20) and things which have been created express the power of the creator very weakly, many things must remain to be considered in the creator which are hidden from us. These are called the secrets of the wisdom of God. […]. Second, because we are not even able to understand the very order of creatures in itself completely in the manner in which it is governed by divine providence. For divine government functions in a very different way from human government. Among men, one is superior in ruling to the extent that his ordering extends to more universal considerations only and he leaves the particular details of government to his subordinates. Thus the law under the direction of a higher ruler is universal and simple. But God is more superior in ruling the more his ordering power extends even to the most insignificant matters. So, the law of his rule is not only secret if we consider the high character of the ruler in exceeding completely any proportion to a creature, but also in the versatility with which he governs every single thing, even the most isolated and most insignificant according to a fixed order.[46]

In Aquinas's commentary a characteristic realism of a philosopher might be heard, a philosopher who is able to accept that his knowledge about the world is not complete. He even admits that the order of creation is not entirely clear for man. He notices, however, using a simple term *aliter* for comparing divine and human orders of acting, that the most significant matter, when reflecting on divine action, is to avoid a trap of closing God in terms and notions.[47] The way of analogy leads to 'luminous darkness' of human language about God.

## 2. HOW GOD PROVIDENTLY ACTS — THREE METAPHORS OF AQUINAS

Let's focus on a few interesting for Aquinas's metaphors that express his manner of understanding the divine action in the world. They have not been yet a subject of a broader analysis because of the fact that most of them are from his biblical commentaries, which are, unfortunately, forgotten by most researchers.[48] However, these commentaries reveal the new perspectives for our discussion, particularly because of some metaphors that Aquinas uses there.[49]

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46   *In Iob.,* cap. XI.
47   Kahm (2013).
48   Roszak, Vijgen (2015).
49   See Marcos (2012: 270-315, the chapter dedicated to metaphors in contemporary science).

Before following these metaphors, we should pay attention to their epistemological sense. Still today, metaphors are one of the frequent tools of theology in many traditions. Although it seems to be a little suspicious because of their informal and imprecise language. The postulate of clarity of reasoning seems to interfere with the little precision of them. But we should recognize that metaphors remain interesting vehicles of the content. Thomas is an exceptional example of caution in their application, but at the same time he is aware of their role in building the models for explaining the reality. It explains that he pays attention to the metaphor already in the first question of his *Summa Theologiae*.

### 2.1 Fire and heat

The first of the metaphors is found in the commentary on the Letter to the Ephesians and treats about the relation between fire and heat. Aquinas tries to explain in this passage why the plan of salvation was hidden in God. It is the relationship that reflects the dialectics of visibility and hiddenness. Apart from the theological themes here, we can see a broader perspective that Aquinas introduces through the so-called 'note', which is one of the characteristic tools for his exegesis (a note begins with a significant *sciendum est* and it is thrown into the course of the lecture). It is worth pausing at this comparison, which can be widely applied to the action of God in the world.[50]

Thomas begins by saying that everything which is in the effects always shines in their reasons, although some of them are visible and some not. Heat is perceptible in fire, although it is invisible. The metaphor of fire and heat also appears on the occasion of Aquinas's reflection on Providence in the *Summa Against the Gentiles*. Aquinas emphasizes that God's Providence is being realized by means of secondary causes. This is his explanation:

> Besides, the stronger the power of an agent is, the farther does its operation extend to more remote effects. For instance, the bigger a fire is, the farther away are the things it heats. But this does not occur in the case of an agent

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50   *In Eph.*, cap. III, lect 2: 'Ubi sciendum est quod omnia quae sunt in effectu, latent virtute in suis causis, sicut in virtute solis continentur omnia quae sunt in generabilibus et corruptibilibus. Sed tamen ibi quaedam sunt abscondita, quaedam manifesta. Nam calor est manifeste in igne; aliquorum vero ratio, quae occulto modo producit, latet in eo. Deus autem est omnium rerum causa efficiens, sed producit quaedam, quorum ratio potest esse manifesta, illa scilicet quae mediantibus causis secundis producit. Aliqua vero sunt in eo abscondita, illa scilicet quae immediate per seipsum producit'.

that acts without a medium, for whatever it acts on is adjacent to it. There-
fore, since the power of divine providence is the greatest, it must extend its
operation to its most distant effects through some intermediaries.[51]

In a similar vein, M. Dodds has built his metaphor of fire and a container
heated by it without losing its specificity so that the effect is common for both
beings, the first and second one.[52] Dodds compares their relationship to the
pan, which is placed on the fire and heats other products. This fire makes
the heated pan able to fry anything: but in fact both create the same effect.
Thomas Aquinas recognizes in a similar manner the relationship between
God and created causes.

### 2.2 Architect and contractor

The second interesting metaphor is the architect and contractor of the pro-
ject, which refers to the commentary on the Letter to the Corinthians, and it
is already in the commentary on the Sentences:

> There is found in regard to artificial things an artisan who only works with
> his hands, executing the orders of another and commanding no one, as the
> one who prepares the material; another who commands the one preparing
> the material, and himself works to introduce the form: another who does
> not work at all but commands, possessing the plan (*rationes*) of the work
> taken from the end of which he is the director and such a one is called an
> architect…'[53]

It means that the architect is still in his draft, although it can be attributed
to both the performers of particular elements, as well as the one who carries
the plan. Hence it is not only a certain type of supervision, but participation
in the process, although not at the same level (because God remains trans-
cendent, with all the connotations that it supposes). Thomas speaks about
*imperium supremi architectoris*,[54] whose power enables the lower architect to

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51    *ScG* III, 77.
52    Dodds (2008: 166).
53    *In Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 10 q. 1 a. 3 ad 1: 'Sicut autem in artificialibus invenitur aliquis artifex qui
tantum manu operatur exequens praeceptum alterius et nulli imperans, sicut ille qui praeparat
materiam; alius vero qui praecipit praeparanti materiam, et ipse operatur ad inducendam for-
mam; alius vero qui nihil operatur sed praecipit, habens rationes operis sumptas ex fine cujus
est conjectator, et talis dicitur architector, quasi princeps artificum, Por. ScG III, 144: cuiuslibet
autem operis ratio a fine sumitur'.
54    *ScG* III, 67, nr 5.

act and in this way we can attribute the same effect to God and creature, although more to God. A similar comparison from the field of architecture can be found in another work of Thomas: 'thus an architect does not put his hands to the production of his art, but only disposes and orders what others are to do.'[55] It is more precisely explained by Aquinas in his commentary on the book of Job where he observes that:

> Next he treats the making of man with reference to the work of propagation by which man is generated from man. Note here that he attributes every work of nature to God, not so as to exclude the operation of nature, but in the way things done through secondary causes are attributed to the principle agent. Similarly the operation of the saw is attributed to the carpenter. The fact that nature operates comes from God, who instituted it for that purpose.[56]

Besides, Thomas observes that Job sees all the works of nature as caused by God, 'not in order to exclude the operation of nature but in the way which things which are done through second causes are attributed to the principal agent, as the operation of the saw is attributed to the artisan.'[57]

### 2.3 Archer and arrow

The third image is an archer and arrow and it reveals Providence by reference to teleology of nature, tending towards its perfection.[58] The need for achieving the end lies not in the shot, but in the archer. St. Thomas explains it in his commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians based on the reflection concerning the resurrection of the body and the relation between God's will and what man has achieved during his life on earth:

> But it is manifest that natural things without knowledge work towards a determined end, otherwise they would not always, or most of the time, reach the same end. And it is manifest that nothing lacking knowledge tends to a fixed and unless directed by a knower, as an arrow tends to a fixed target

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55   *S. Th.* I, q. 112 a. 4 ad 1: 'Sicut architectores in artificiis nihil manu operantur, sed solum disponunt et praecipiunt quid alii debeant operari'.
56   *In Iob*, cap. X.
57   *In Iob*, cap. X.
58   *Sententia Metaphysicae*, lib. V, lect. 2, n. 6. 'In hoc tamen differt ab agente principali, quia principale agens agit ad finem proprium, adiuvans autem ad finem alienum; sicut qui adiuvat regem in bello, operatur ad finem regis. Et haec est dispositio causae secundariae ad primam; nam causa secunda operatur propter finem primae causae in omnibus agentibus per se ordinatis, sicut militaris propter finem civilis'.

by the direction of the bowman. Therefore, just as if someone saw an arrow directly moving toward a definite target and did not see a bowman, would immediately know that it was directed by a bowman, so when we see natural things without knowledge tend to definite ends, we can know for certain that they are acting under the will of some director, which we call God.[59]

## CONCLUSION

The topic of Divine Providence can serve as a 'philosophical lens' which focuses on the central issue in systematic theology. The fundamental question is how God acts and what language can be used to describe it. For Aquinas the solution consists in adopting the analogy as an appropriate instrument for reflection on the causality of God. In this manner he avoids the superficial conclusion that God is a cause among causes.[60] Aquinas introduces the important (and still valid, as we could observe!) distinction between the primary and secondary causes, underlining that they belong to a different order.

At the same time, according to Aquinas, God's Providence requires the contingency feature of the universe. Analogical understanding of divine causality demands not placing God and His creation on the same level, which is a basic assumption of Christian theology developed on the grounds of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. We cannot speak about divine action 'from outside' on a particular order of things as the effect of acting of a universal cause must embrace all things. Freedom of acting of secondary causes is inscribed in the logic of providence because this free acting is a proper mode of causality of rational creature. As Rudi te Velde observed,

> The problem of human freedom and providence (of a sovereign and all-powerful God) is a typically modern problem resulting from the difficulty to reconcile human freedom with our status as secondary cause. Also typically modern is the tendency to think about freedom in terms of counterfactuals: what if I decide to do otherwise, can my free decision be a surprise for God? […] And what we, as rational creatures really want is not so much freedom as such, but the free fulfilment of our desire. The exercise of human freedom is therefore embedded in the teleological order of creation.[61]

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59   *In I Cor.*, cap. XV, lect. 5
60   Silva (2014a: 8-20).
61   Velde (2013: 60).

That's why, the metaphysical language of Thomas, with this analogical impress, is less prone to these errors which grow out of the univocal understanding of causality of God and creature and it still is worth our attention.[62]

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# THE 'POWER'-FUL TRINITY

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**Abstract.** This paper proposes a new orthodox Latin model of the Trinity, through employing current work from the metaphysics of powers. It outlines theses defended within the contemporary powers literature that form the backbone of the account and then shows how they can be combined to provide an orthodox metaphysics of the Trinity. Having done this it addresses a further element required for orthodoxy, the ontological priority of the Father, and notes a particular benefit that comes along with the model. The paper concludes by posing and answering some objections one might raise against the account.

## THE 'POWER'-FUL TRINITY[1]

'The Christian faith chiefly consists in confessing the holy Trinity,'[2] writes Aquinas, since it is who Christians claim God is.[3] This paper proposes a new orthodox model for conceptualising the metaphysics of this doctrine, through employing work from the metaphysics of powers. It begins by first outlining the main tenants of an orthodox Trinitarian model, and proceeds by stating theses defended within contemporary powers literature that form the backbone of my account. With these theses stated I then show how they can be combined to provide one with an orthodox metaphysics of the Trinity. Having done this I address a further element required for orthodoxy, the ontological priority of the Father, and then note a particular benefit that comes

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1 A previous version of this paper was presented at Oxford Univ. in a works in progress seminar to the members of the Metaphysics of Entanglement project, and I would like to thank them for all their valuable feedback. I also wish to thank Gregory Stacey, Ralph Walker, William Wood, Jonathan Hill, James Hanvey, & Anna Marmodoro for their insightful comments on an earlier draft.

2 Aquinas, *De Rationibus Fidei*. c.1.

3 Gregory of Nazianzus makes this clear writing, 'When I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Ghost.' *Oration* 45.4.

along with my model. Finally, I conclude by posing and answering some objections one might raise against my account.

Before getting started however, one preliminary remark is in order. Within Trinitarian literature a distinction is drawn between Latin Trinitarianism (henceforth LT) and Social Trinitarianism (henceforth ST). Some recent work has disputed such a historic distinction,[4] but since I take this distinction as referring to differing explanatory projects, its historicity need not concern me. I therefore follow Brian Leftow in thinking that,

> ST takes the three Persons as in some way basic and explains how they constitute or give rise to one God. … [Whereas] LT takes the one God as in some way basic and explains how one God gives rise to three Persons.[5]

Since I think good reasons can be given for being sceptical that ST is able to provide an orthodox conception of the Trinity,[6] I offer a LT model which attempts to preserve a clear notion of the divine unity. My model should be seen as a welcome addition to LT, because by contrast with ST, LT severely lacks possible models.

## TRINITARIAN CLAIMS

Within Trinitarian theorising it is widely accepted that Orthodoxy requires us to embrace four claims:

1. There is one God

2. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God

3. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identical

4. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of one substance

Recently a number of models have been formulated to show the compatibility and consistency of these claims,[7] with some modelling the Trinity on the

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4    Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (OUP, 2004).

5    Brian Leftow, 'Two Trinities: Reply to Hasker', *Religious Studies* 46, no. 04 (2010): 441.

6    Brian Leftow, 'Anti Social Trinitarianism', in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. by Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (OUP, 2009); Keith Ward, *Christ and the Cosmos: A Reformulation of Trinitarian Doctrine* (CUP, 2015).

7    By model I mean to provide an account as to how these four claims could be jointly compatible or true.

time travelling Rockette Jane,[8] the three-headed mythical dog Cerberus,[9] the bronze statue of the Greek goddess Athena,[10] and a single mental substance/soul.[11] Not content on missing out on all the fun of creating imaginative models, I wish to throw my hat into the ring by offering an alternative proposal, which makes use of elements of contemporary power metaphysics.

## POWER METAPHYSICS

Contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of science have been particularly interested in powers/dispositions/capacities/tendencies/potentialities,[12] where powers are property-like entities that have an essential causal role that cannot vary across possible worlds. [13] Powerful properties therefore differ from categorical properties, the other dominant position concerning the nature of properties, since categorical properties have a nature that is 'self-contained, [and] distinct from the powers that they bestow.'[14] Consequently, unlike powers, categorical properties have a causal role that can vary across possible worlds, and as such their identity is usually determined by quiddities. Since my Trinitarian model relies on powers, I shall list the theses I have raided from the power metaphysics literature. However, before doing so I should note that it is not my aim to defend these theses here, some of which are by no means universally accepted, but rather to show what can be achieved with them if one finds them viable. Due to this my project can be seen as showing that a coherent account of the Trinity can be given if these theses are correct, whilst also admitting that if they turn out to be false the account is un-illuminating.[15]

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8    Brian Leftow, 'A Latin Trinity', *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2004).
9    William Lane Craig and James Porter Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 575-95.
10    Jeffery E. Brower and Michael C. Rea, 'Material Constitution and the Trinity', *Faith and Philosophy*, 22 no. 1 (2005).
11    William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (OUP, 2013).
12    I use these terms synonymously.
13    Stephen Mumford, *Dispositions* (OUP, 1998); George Molnar, *Powers* (OUP, 2003); Alexander Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics* (OUP, 2007); Anna Marmodoro, *The Metaphysics of Powers* (Routledge, 2010); John Greco and Ruth Groff, eds., *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy: The New Aristotelianism* (Routledge, 2013); Jonathan Jacobs, ed., *Causal Powers* (OUP, 2017).
14    David M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (CUP, 1997), 69.
15    Perhaps theists will have further reason to adopt these theses apart from the arguments for them in the literature, if they agree that it provides a coherent Trinitarian account.

### Thesis 1: Some powers can exist without categorical properties

Thesis one holds that some powers can exist without being grounded in categorical properties. Pandispositonalists hold this in virtue of thinking all properties are powers, and as such there are no categorical properties.[16] However, I only require that some powers are not grounded in categorical properties and therefore one could hold to dualism, thinking both powers and categorical properties exist.[17] Since this thesis is prominent within the powers literature, and given that some have gone so far as to suggest that science reveals that the most fundamental level of reality consists of bare powerful properties,[18] many will grant me this thesis's plausibility.

### Thesis 2: Some powers are multi-track[19]

Thesis two takes sides over a current debate within the powers literature, as to whether powers are single-track, have one manifestation, or multi-track, have more than one manifestation.[20] Prima facie warrant for siding with multi-trackers comes from everyday examples. For instance, Stephen Mumford thinks,

> Being elastic … affords many different possibilities. … An ability to bounce (when dropped) is different from an ability to bend (when pressured) though both might reasonably be thought powers of something that is elastic, in virtue of its elasticity.[21]

John Heil suggests another example writing,

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16    Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics*; Stephen Mumford, *Laws in Nature* (Routledge, 2004); Simon Bostock, 'In Defence of Pan-Dispositionalism', *Metaphysica* 9, no.2 (2008).

17    Perhaps one could hold to a dual-aspect theory like Heil, thinking all properties are both irreducibly powerful and categorical (what he terms qualitative). However, one would also have to hold that the qualitative nature of these properties is neither physical and/or structural so as to be compatible with my Trinitarian picture: John Heil, *The Universe as We Find It* (OUP, 2012), 82-83.

18    Simon Blackburn, 'Filling in Space', *Analysis* 50, no. 2 (1990): 63; Peter F. Strawson, 'Reply to Evans', in *Philosophical Subjects*, ed. Zak van Straaten (OUP, 1980), 280.

19    Maybe one could formulate an alternative thesis through modifying Marmodoro's multi-stage powers so that single-trackers could get on board with my model. However, there may be difficulties in keeping the stages distinct and yet simultaneous. Due to space, I do not investigate this option any further here. Anna Marmodoro, *Aristotle on Perceiving Objects* (OUP, 2014), 125, 130-33.

20    Unlike Vetter, I do not define multi-track as, 'has multiple stimulus conditions', but rather that one power can manifest in different ways, for instance by doing A, B, C, etc. Barbara Vetter, 'Multi-Track Dispositions', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 63, no. 251 (2013).

21    Mumford, *Laws in Nature*, 172.

> A ball's sphericity endows it with a power to roll. But it is also in virtue of being spherical that the ball has the power to make a concave, circular impression in a cushion, the power to reflect light so as to look spherical, the power to feel spherical to the touch.[22]

Perhaps there are two types of multi-track powers, those with different qualitative manifestations, such as Heil's example above, and those with different quantitative manifestations, that is a varying intensity of the same manifestation type, such as the power rubber has to stretch to differing lengths.[23] My model will require a qualitative multi-track power, the more controversial type of multi-track powers. However, despite objections raised against these types of multi-track powers,[24] my thesis sides with Neil Williams' defence of them and his conclusion that,

> The moral ought to be clear: we should treat powers as capable of being multi-track. That is not to suggest that they all are, but some or many could be that way. … Whether any powers are in fact multi-track is strictly beyond our epistemic ken. We are left with 'best guesses' about the nature of powers, and these are extra-empirical, despite being guided by the sciences in question.[25]

*Thesis 3: A power in actuality (or manifesting) is numerically the same power in potentiality (or yet to manifest), rather than some distinct power*

This thesis holds with Anna Marmodoro that 'there is no polyadic relation connecting a power in potentiality to its manifestation, since the manifestation is numerically the same power in a different state.'[26] This contrasts other accounts of powers which appear to hold that the manifestation of a power is a *new* power,[27] and instead holds that 'an activated power is the very same power as the power in potentiality, but it is now manifesting.'[28] Yet the af-

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22    Heil, *The Universe as We Find It*, 121.

23    For potential difficulties with this distinction see: Neil E. Williams, 'Putting Powers Back on Multi-Track', *Philosophia* 39, no. 3 (2011).

24    E. Jonathan Lowe, 'On the Individuation of Powers', in *The Metaphysics of Powers*, ed. by Anna Marmodoro (Routledge, 2010).

25    Williams, 'Putting Powers Back on Multi-Track', 594.

26    Anna Marmodoro, 'Aristotelian Powers at Work', in *Putting Powers to Work*, ed. by Jonathan Jacobs (OUP, 2017), 65.

27    Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics*, 107; Stephen Mumford and Rani L. Anjum, *Getting Causes From Powers* (OUP, 2011), 5; Mumford, *Laws in Nature*, 171.

28    Marmodoro, *Aristotle on Perceiving Objects*, 20.

firmation of my thesis is by no means novel, with Aristotle[29] and Aquinas[30] holding this view. With such a historical precedent and contemporary defence of this thesis, I shall also add it to my metaphysical toolkit.[31]

## Thesis 4: Some powers always manifest

Thesis four holds that some powers always manifest, such that there are no conditions where they are only ready to manifest.[32] A number of power theorists hold there to be such powers with William Bauer, for instance, writing that 'while F does not nearly manifest all it is capable of at any given time, F does manifest some of its power thereby continuously existing.'[33] Marmodoro provides an example from contemporary physics of these types of powers suggesting,

> the power of electric charge of an electron is always exercising as a wave that generates an electric field. There are no electric charges which are in potentiality, i.e. not giving rise to an electric field, although the field may not be interacting with anything in its environment.[34]

Given that this thesis has pretty widespread support within the literature, I shall make use of a modified version of it, which I shall further explicate later.

## Thesis 5: Some powers are individuated and identified by their manifestations only

The final thesis holds that even though powers are usually individuated and identified by their stimulus conditions and manifestations, some powers are individuated and identified by their manifestations alone. One reason for holding this is due to thesis four, which held that some powers manifest in

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29   Charlotte Witt, *Ways of Being* (Cornell Univ. Press, 2003), 38-58; Marmodoro, *Aristotle on Perceiving Objects*, 13.

30   *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a.11; *Contra Gentiles*, lib.2 ca.45 n.3; *Summa Theologiae* I, q.54 a.1.

31   One reason for adopting this view is because it provides a good answer to the always packing never traveling argument against powers, which says if a manifestation of a power results in another power then there is never any motion since there is no movement from potency to act, rather all we have is one potency after another. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, 80.

32   These powers could perhaps be the building blocks of reality due to their constant actuality and therefore presumably preclude the need for categorical properties to do this.

33   William A. Bauer, (2012) 'Four Theories of Pure Dispositions', in *Properties, Powers, and Structures*, ed. by Alexander Bird, Brian Ellis and Howard Sankey (Routledge, 2012), 157.

34   Anna Marmodoro, 'Power Mereology: structural versus substantial powers', in *Philosophical and Scientific Perspectives on Downward Causation*, ed. by Michele Paolini Paoletti and Francesco Orilia (Routledge, 2017), 113-4.

all conditions, even if there were only a single power in existence. If we had to include the stimulus conditions within the identity of these powers, they would have to list every possible state of affairs, something that appears impossible.[35] However, perhaps by drawing a distinction between constitutive and epistemic identity criteria we could say that even though we can never epistemically articulate all the stimulus conditions of these powers, we can still provide the stimulus condition 'any state of affairs' as their constitutive identity criteria. Supposing this move is acceptable, then I also can work with this thesis, that some powers have constitutive identity criteria whose stimulus conditions are 'any state of affairs.'

These theses provide me with a power based metaphysical toolkit, and it is with these tools that I formulate my Trinitarian model.

## MULTI-TRACK TRINITY

Employing the first thesis I hold that there is one power trope that has no categorical base, where I specify this to be a trope since tropes are unrepeatable individual properties, and I don't want there to be any further instances of this type of power.[36] I suggest we take this purely powerful property to be a property God possesses, that of deity, the property which makes God divine. This should be relatively uncontroversial since powers are usually taken to be properties, but here I want to challenge the thought that deity is only a property. For instance, Brian Leftow writes,

> Perhaps deity is not a property. Aquinas held that God is identical with His nature (*ST* Ia 3, 3). If He is, 'God' and 'deity' refer to the same thing. If they do, either God is a property or deity is not a property.[37]

Not everyone will be willing to embrace this thought, that God is a property, even though a number of theists have endorsed it.[38] One worry here is that

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35   This thesis has been argued for on other grounds not discussed here: Barbara Vetter, *Potentiality: From Dispositions to Modality* (OUP, 2014), ch.3.

36   Mann makes a similar move in his defence of Divine Simplicity by suggesting God is a causal power, although he doesn't flesh this out in much detail. William E. Mann, 'Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris', *Religious Studies* 22, 3-4 (1986): 352–3.

37   Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (OUP, 2012), 136, n.3.

38   Mann, 'Simplicity and Properties'; William F. Vallicella, 'Divine Simplicity: A New Defence', *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no.4.

properties require bearers, and thus the property deity would also seemingly require a bearer. However, one could suggest that we follow those who think there are free-floating tropes that do not require bearers, where tropes are more fundamental than the entities they compose.[39] Alternatively perhaps one could say that the deity trope has itself as its bearer. In either case the trope deity will not depend on anything else for its existence, but rather has an independent existence.

Perhaps instead we could suggest that deity, a power existing without any categorical grounding, shouldn't be thought of as a property at all, but rather a substance. One reason for thinking this might be as follows. Descartes defines a substance as, 'a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence.'[40] Given this definition we can say that the pure power deity is a substance, rather than a property, because it depends upon nothing else for its existence, with this becoming clearer after we apply thesis four. Since similar moves can be made even if one employs contemporary definitions of substance,[41] it seems to me that we can quite plausibly speak of the pure power deity as a substance.

If you dislike this option, then perhaps we can instead follow Aquinas and place God beyond the substance-attribute dichotomy. We can then embrace the thought that due to God's transcendence, it is 'Far better to say that God is metaphysically *sui generis*, and that there is nothing further to be said about the ontological category to which God belongs.'[42] My pure power deity then, could be thought of along these lines, as something modelled on a power, yet being of some *sui generis* ontological category.[43]

Yet, supposing you are hard to please and dislike this approach too, then I suggest you interpret '*ousia*' and '*substantia*' as referring to the general category 'entity.' Doing this allows us to say that the pure power trope deity is an

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39    Keith Campbell, *Abstract Particulars*. (Blackwell, 1990); Kathrin Koslicki 'Questions of On-tology', in *Ontology after Carnap*, ed. by Stephan Blatti and Sandra Lapointe (OUP, 2016), 224-38.
40    Descartes. *Principles of Philosophy* (I. 51), in *Descartes Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. by John Cottingham et al. (CUP, 1988), 177.
41    E. Jonathan Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity and Time* (OUP, 1998), 158; Heil, *The Universe as We Find It*, 42.
42    Graham Oppy, *Describing Gods: An Investigation of Divine Attributes* (CUP 2014), 103; Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 306.
43    Whatever ontological category this is, it will refer to whatever is meant by '*ousia*' in the Nicene Creed and '*substantia*' in the Athanasian Creed.

entity and so too is God, where these turn out to be numerically identical with each other. Thesis one, therefore, seems to be applicable to God, and can be understood in one of the ways I have suggested, either where God is a property, substance, a *sui generis* kind, or entity. Nevertheless, whatever option one takes I will continue to speak of powers as properties since they are usually talked of as such, but this must be taken as a *façon de parler*, where what is really meant is one of the options spelled out here. With all this said, I shall assume Aquinas is correct meaning that God and deity refer to the same thing, and thus that God = the power trope deity.

However, perhaps you just don't like the claim that deity is a power and therefore reject my model before it has gotten started, since you say God is a person. Three responses can be given to this. The first is to issue a reminder, stating that all I am proposing here is a metaphysical model as to how to think about the Trinity. One must remember that models only depict/image/mirror reality, but are never identical to reality itself, and as such they shouldn't be taken to represent reality perfectly in every way. My use of powers, then, need not be thought of as univocally applying to God, but could instead be thought of as analogical. All I require is that God has some features similar to powers. Secondly, I appeal to historic considerations where a move like this, at least according to some commentators, was made by Aquinas when he identified God as *actus purus*.[44] Just as a power's nature has something to do with being causal and active, Aquinas holds that 'God is pure activity.'[45] As Fergus Kerr writes, for Aquinas 'God's nature *is* activity — though activity with a certain 'subsistency.'[46] Yet this is very similar to my conception of God as a pure power, where this power, as I have just sought to show, plausibly has some type of 'subsistency.'[47] Finally, some have made a distinction within philosophy of religion between classical theism and theistic personalism,[48] where theistic personalism holds

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44   Rogers argues elsewhere that act and personhood are compatible. Katherin A. Rogers, 'The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', *Religious Studies* 32, no. 02 (1996): 172.

45   Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, a.1, obj.3. in Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas: Basic Works*, ed. Jeffrey Hause and Robert Pasnau, The Hackett Aquinas (Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), 503.

46   Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Blackwell, 2002), 190.

47   I'm not claiming that Aquinas thought of God as a power, but rather that there are aspects of his thought that closely resemble mine.

48   Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* 3rd ed. (OUP, 2004), 9-14; David B. Hart, *The Experience of God* (Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 127.

that personhood is the basis from which God should be conceptualized.[49] Classical theists, however, reject this starting point and suggest that even though God possesses personal attributes, e.g. intellect and will, He should not primarily be conceptualized on being a person, since this anthropomorphizes Him, but rather as being metaphysically ultimate, where this usually results in God being *actus purus*. With this distinction, one can place my account within the classical theistic tradition, where personhood is not primary. Given all this, it seems I have some fairly good justification for my starting point, particularly given the venerable tradition of God conceived as pure act.

Applying thesis two, that some powers are multi-track, we come to hold that the power deity has more than one manifestation. One will be unsurprised to know that I take deity to have three manifestations, merely because the Trinity comprises three persons. I follow Aquinas here in thinking that knowledge of God as three persons comes from divine revelation rather than reason,[50] and as such I am sceptical of attempts to show by argument that there must be three persons within the Trinity.[51] Nonetheless, if these arguments are successful they strengthen my case, since they will provide some plausibility to the claim that deity only has three manifestations. However, unfortunately currently the only reason I have for there being three manifestations is that the creeds have it that way. Integrating this thesis with the first means there are three different manifestations to the power deity, a power not grounded in any categorical property.

Through employing thesis three, that a power in potentiality is numerically the same power as it in actuality, we get the result that each manifestation of deity, deity in actuality, is the same as deity when it is not manifesting, deity in potentiality.[52] Using Heil's example of an electron's negative charge being multi-track,[53] we can say that the repelling of other electrons, attracting positrons, and responding to a Geiger counter are all just aspects of the electron's negative charge being in actuality. Thus, repelling other electrons is an electron's

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49    Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*. (OUP, 1977), 1, 104-105.
50    Aquinas, *De Trinitate*. q.1 a.4. co.
51    Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (OUP, 1994), 170-191; Sarah Coakley, 'Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Origin of the Doctrine of the Trinity', in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, ed. by Sarah Coakley and David Pailin (OUP, 1993), 29-56.
52    As I go on to show, I don't ever think deity is found in a state of potentiality, but in order to illustrate the account, and due to needing a thesis like this, I plead one to bear with me in thinking about this counterpossible.
53    Heil, *The Universe as We Find It,* 121.

negative charge in actuality, the attracting of positrons is an electron's negative charge in actuality, and making a Geiger counter respond is an electron's negative charge in actuality. Yet presumably these are not the same manifestations, the repelling of an electron is not the same action as attracting a positron or making a Geiger counter respond. The closest analogue to this thought concerning deity and its three manifestation tracks is Leftow's idea that there are three simultaneous life streams in God.[54] We will go on to see that these tracks also manifest simultaneously.

Summarising so far, there is one multi-track pure power deity trope which has three manifestations, and yet whilst each manifestation is different all the manifestations are deity in actuality, such that if you pointed to the first manifestation you would say, 'that's deity', if you pointed to the second manifestation you would say, 'that's deity', and if you pointed to the third manifestation you would say, 'that's deity.' Since these are the only manifestations of deity, all of these add up to God's life. The result of my proposal thereby makes possible Leftow's claim that the 'three divine Persons are at bottom just God: they contain no constituent distinct from God. The Persons are in some way God three times over.'[55] On my conception there is one trope deity, which is God, and the manifestations of the multi-tracks are just deity in actuality three times over.

Applying thesis four, that some powers always manifest, gives us the result that deity is a power that manifests its three tracks continually since it is always in a state of actuality. However, as mentioned previously, I require a slightly modified version of this thesis since deity must necessarily rather than always manifest. Plausibly I might have a power to become angry which manifests whenever I'm around someone, say my conjoined twin. Yet because I cannot separate from my conjoined twin this power is always in actuality. Nevertheless, we don't think this power necessarily manifests, rather it only contingently manifests despite it never ceasing. Deity, however, does not contingently manifest, but necessarily manifests. I therefore take deity to be a power that is purely actual, such that it necessarily manifests, and thus no conditions are required to actualize this power because it is always, eternally, manifesting. As a result of this there is no answer to the question, 'when could deity manifest one of its

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54    Leftow, 'A Latin Trinity', 312-313.
55    Brian Leftow, 'Modes without Modalism', in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. by Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (OUP, 2007), 357.

multi-tracks?' since deity is purely actual and as such cannot but manifest in its threefold way. Deity just is the manifestation in three distinct ways, and there are no possible conditions such that it ceases to manifest in these three ways.

It is important to see that this is different from other worldly powers, for instance the power of an electron's negative charge, since conditions are required in order that it manifests one of its multi-track's, such as the power to repel, or attract. Further, the power of an electron's negative charge also illustrates what it means for a power to have different states, being in potency or act. Yet deity never experiences differing states since there is necessarily no time when this power is in potency, as it is always and continuously in actuality and therefore manifesting. The result of this is that for deity there is no alternative state other than eternally manifesting in a threefold way. We might come to think of this move made by thesis four, as somewhat analogous to Aquinas's thought that God's essence is His existence,[56] since it is just the essence of deity to eternally manifest in a threefold way in every possible situation.

Thesis five has pretty much already been applied, as I have stressed that there are no specific conditions required for deity to manifest in its threefold way. Since these multi-track manifestations are just the same power, deity in actuality, this power is not individuated by its manifestation conditions but by its manifestations. What then are the manifestations of deity? They are the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these manifestations, however, is just the power deity in actuality, and as such Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally deity in actuality.

How then do the manifestations differ, such that they are distinct manifestations, thus allowing deity to be multi-track? Multi-track powers typically only have different manifestations due to interacting with differing power partners. Hence an electron acts in different ways when it is met with the power negative charge, positive charge, or a Geiger counter. It is the differing manifestation conditions that make the differing tracks manifest (or actualize). Yet, as I have emphasized, in the case of deity no differing manifestations conditions are required to make deity manifest in a threefold way, rather deity necessarily does. How then are we to make sense of this?

One option would be to appeal to divine transcendence again, claiming deity is a *sui generis* type of multi-track power that doesn't require any distinct

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56    Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q.3, a.4.

manifestation conditions for the manifestation of the three tracks. However, this is a weak response, and it would be good if we could do better. Perhaps instead we should say that the manifestation conditions of deity do change due to the manifestations of each of the individual tracks. We could then say that part of the stimulus conditions for the second track is the manifestation of the first track, and the stimulus conditions for the third track is the manifestation of the first and second tracks. The differing manifestation conditions would then denote the different manifestations of deity and hence the different persons, where this will be analogous to those theologians who took the divine persons to be distinguished by their relations of origin.[57]

Orthodoxy has it that the Father is in some way the source of the Son and Spirit, and therefore we can say that the first manifestation track of deity manifests as the Father, where this manifestation occurs necessarily given any conditions and as such is individuated by its manifestation alone, per thesis five. Since the Son in some way depends upon the Father, we can say that His stimulus condition is the manifestation of the Father, the first track. Therefore, since the Father is necessarily manifesting in the first track, the Son necessarily manifests in the second track, since the Son's stimulus conditions have been met. Given that the manifestation conditions are now once again different, we can say that the third track, the Spirit, has as Its stimulus conditions the manifestation of the Father and Son, the first and second track. Given that these two are manifesting the Spirit also manifests in the third-track. One might be concerned that Eastern Orthodoxy cannot buy into this account since the third track requires that the Father and Son manifest and hence there seems to be some type of reliance on the Son as well as the Father for the manifestation of the Spirit rather than the Father alone. However, this worry can be overcome if a distinction can be made between stimulus conditions and ontological dependence, where one can say that the Son only changes the stimulus conditions such that the Spirit manifests, yet ontologically we can say the Spirit fully depends upon the Father.[58] Despite there being distinct stimulus conditions for the three manifestations they will still turn out to be necessary, eternal, and simultaneous, which is of vital importance since these are requirements for orthodoxy.

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57   Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.27; Augustine, *De Trinitate* V, 5; Anselm, *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, 2.
58   Something I will address further shortly.

Questions, however, might be asked of me as to whether this answer has sacrificed orthodoxy for consistency, since now the Father alone appears to be *a se* whilst the Son and Spirit are not.[59] It seems to me, however, that this type of questioning is one that anyone who tries to explain the priority within the Trinity is liable too, and so perhaps I can just reply that I am no worse off than anyone else. However, other answers to these types of concerns can be given, where Mark Makin has done the most to answer this form of objection. In short, one approach would be too

> invoke the accepted distinction between the divine essence (*ousia*) and the person (*hypostasis*) … [and] maintain that the Son possesses aseity with respect to the divine essence, but not with respect to his person. … Admittedly, the Son does not possess aseity with respect to his person, as opposed to the Father, … But it is not at all clear that this difference entails that the Son is not fully divine.[60]

Makin goes on to provide answers to further rejoinders to this type of response, but suffice to say I take this objection to my view to be surmountable and one all defenders of orthodoxy need to deal with.

My view then, can be seen as following Leftow's thought that

> what distinguishes God the Father from God the Son is simply which act God is performing. God the Father is God fathering. God the Son is God filiating, or being fathered. The Persons simply are God as in certain acts--certain events-in His inner life.[61]

In my terminology, the one power deity that is eternally manifesting, manifests in one track as the Father fathering, in the second track as the Son filiating or being fathered, and in the third track as the Holy Spirit spirating, where there is no possible world in which these simultaneous manifestations do not occur at all times. Thus, my model holds with Thomas Weinandy that 'the persons of the Trinity are not nouns; they are verbs and the names which designate them — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — designate the acts by which they are

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59    Craig appeals to this as justification for bypassing the need of explaining the priority relations within the Trinity. Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 594.

60    Mark Makin, 'God from God: The Essential Dependence Model of Eternal Generation', *Religious Studies* (forthcoming).

61    Leftow, 'Latin Trinity', 315-316.

defined.'[62] If one asks me the further question as to what the persons on my account are, I once again follow Leftow in thinking 'the right answer is that they are whatever sort God is- the Persons just *are* God, as the Latin approach will have it. The Persons have the same trope of deity.'[63] This is by no means as informative as many people would like, however since the notion of personhood is much disputed within both philosophy and theology, with some Trinitarians such as Barth and Rahner rejecting this terminology altogether,[64] I am not much concerned by leaving this element of my model vague.

Summarising, my model holds that there is a single powerful deity trope that isn't grounded in any categorical property, and further that deity is a multi-track power that has essentially three manifestation tracks.[65] Since I hold that a power manifesting (in actuality) is numerically the same power as when it is waiting to manifest (in potentiality), the manifestation of deity, even though multi-track, is just deity in actuality. I further claim that deity is a pure power that necessarily manifests, thereby being purely actual, such that it could never fail to manifest in any possible world. Therefore, deity in actuality just is the manifesting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Finally, I claim the distinctions between the manifestations are due to the relations between each manifestation, since if the manifestations were wholly identical we would have to hold that deity is single-track rather than multi-track. This outline of my model seemingly captures everything the Creed of the Council of Toledo affirms when it says,

> although we profess three persons, we do not profess three substances, but one substance and three persons … they are not three gods, he is one God. … Each single Person is wholly God in Himself and … all three persons together are one God.[66]

Nevertheless, there is a further complication of orthodoxy that I now seek to address.

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62   Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (T&T Clark, 2000), 118-119.
63   Leftow, 'Latin Trinity', 314.
64   Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I.1 (T & T Clark, 1936), 359; Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (Burns & Oates Limited, 1970), 109.
65   Perhaps we can remove the trope-ish nature by following Leftow's argument, which concludes that, 'God is the whole ontology for *God is divine.*' See: Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 305-308.
66   Quoted in: Leftow 'Latin Trinity', 304.

## THE PRIORITY OF THE FATHER

Whilst I have used the priority of the Father in my explanation of the changing stimulus conditions for the three manifestation-tracks of deity, I am still yet to explain the Father's priority relating to ontological dependence. Since many today take this type of priority as causal, something affirmed by both Catholic and Orthodox theologians,[67] I shall suggest how my model can account for this.

In order to do this, I will make use of the notion of grounding, where grounding is understood as a relation of generation or determination. Grounding is also typically taken to be non-reductive,[68] irreflexive, asymmetric, and transitive, which will be important for our notion of priority.[69] An example, however, provides the easiest way of understanding what grounding is thought to be. The singleton set 1 (from now on {1}) is plausibly grounded in the number 1, since the existence of 1 explains the existence of {1}. Further, since Grounding has been taken by some to be akin to metaphysical causation, this gives us further reason to think that it might be useful in explicating the causal priority within the Trinity.[70]

Employing the notion of ground, we can say that the Father, grounds the Son such that if there were no Father there would be no Son, and yet since there is the Father there must be the Son. A similar story could be told regarding the Holy Spirit, where either the Father alone, or the Father and Son ground the Holy Spirit. Utilising Grounding's formal features we can say that the Father immediately and fully grounds the Son and, depending on one's theology, that the Father mediately and fully grounds the Holy Spirit, or that the Father and Son immediately and each partially ground the Holy Spirit.[71] We can further hold that the Father is absolutely fundamental and unground-

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67    Kallistos M. Ware, 'The Holy Trinity: Model for Personhood-in-Relation', in *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, ed. by John Polkinghorne (Eerdmans, 2010), 116; Giles Emery, *The Trinity: an introduction to Catholic doctrine on the triune God* (The Catholic Univ. Press of America, 2011), 121.

68    Kit Fine, 'The Question of Realism', *Philosophers' Imprint* 1, no. 2 (2001): 15.

69    Jonathan Schaffer, 'On What Grounds What', in *Metametaphysics*, ed. by David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (OUP, 2009), 376.

70    Jonathan Schaffer, (2016) 'Grounding in the image of causation', *Philosophical Studies*, 173, no. 1 (2016); Alastair Wilson, 'Metaphysical Causation', *Noûs* 37, no. 1 (2017).

71    For explanation of these features: Kit Fine, 'Guide to Ground', in *Metaphysical Grounding*, ed. by Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder (CUP, 2012).

ed, since nothing else explains His existence, since He just is the first track of deity in actuality. Thus, it seems we have a way to spell out the ontological priority found within the Trinity.

There is, however, a potential problem. If we take numbers to be abstractions, then 'we see that, of logical necessity, the natural numbers exist provided anything at all exists.'[72] Therefore once the first track of deity manifests as Father, you also have numbers, and hence the Father grounds numbers. But do we want to say that the Father grounds the Son with the same type of necessity as He grounds numbers? If we don't mind, this worry is adverted, however if this is a concern then we can either question the account of numbers presupposed, or suggest that deity, the three manifestations, jointly ground numbers rather than the Father alone. This second response, however, doesn't look particularly promising since there seems no reason why the individual tracks couldn't themselves ground numbers. A final response denies that grounding is univocal, and therefore claims there are different strengths of grounding, such that the Father more firmly grounds the Son than He does numbers, or vice versa.[73] This I suggest, would be accepted by the Nicene theologians who 'came to agree that this act of generation [in my terminology grounding] is unique: it fits into no category of generation that we know—however much we can make use of very distant likeness in the created order.'[74] Yet this option won't satisfy some metaphysicians and therefore they must either ignore this concern or hold to a different view of numbers.

If one doesn't like my grounding suggestion for accounting for the ontological dependence within the Trinity, an alternative would be to follow Makin's essential dependence model, where 'eternal generation is a form of rigid essential dependence … [such that] the Son is eternally begotten of the Father =*df*. The Father is a constituent of a real definition of the Son, and the Son exists eternally.'[75] Using this framework one can then provide an equally appropriate definition of essential dependence for the Holy Spirit, which could be altered for Orthodox or Catholic accounts. Whichever type of account one prefers, grounding or es-

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72  Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, 226.

73  This could answer Makin's concern that the relations of generation and procession would not differ on a grounding model. Makin, 'God from God.'

74  Lewis Ayres, 'Augustine on the Trinity', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. by Giles Emery and Matthew Levering (OUP, 2011), 124

75  Makin, 'God from God.'

sential dependence, my multi-track Trinity can accommodate either. However, it should be noted that neither account spells out how the relations between the persons arise, but rather only describes their ontological priority. If asked how these arise I follow William Hasker in thinking, 'the best reply is that no further explanation can be given; at least no one has ever succeeded in providing an illuminating explanation.'[76] Nevertheless, despite leaving the person generating relations as somewhat mysterious, I hope to have shown that my model has resources to account for the priority within the Trinity.

## HOW MANY ...?

Having given my model, I wish to highlight a particular benefit of my account concerning how many streams of consciousness and sets of omni-attributes my account allows for. Starting with the divine consciousness, should we think there is 'one wholly integrated divine consciousness and will with three necessary, inseparable, and complementary modes of activity',[77] as theologians like Barth and Rahner did?[78] Or should we take McCall's advice that 'Trinitarian theology should insist on an understanding of persons … as distinct centres of consciousness and will who exist together in loving relationships of mutual dependence',[79] thus thinking there are three distinct consciousnesses as Moltmann and Pannenberg did?[80]

   Perhaps we needn't worry about choosing here, since one of the benefits of my model is that it can accommodate either position. On the single consciousness view, we can say consciousness is linked to deity, and since there is only one deity trope, there is only one consciousness that is possessed by the three manifestations. Thus, although the manifestations are distinct, they are not so distinct as to lack sharing anything, where perhaps part of what they share is the singular consciousness. Nonetheless, if one prefers thinking that there are three consciousnesses, one for each person, my model can account for this by

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76   Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 220; Leftow thinks likewise: Leftow, 'Latin Trinity', 314.

77   Ward, *Christ and the Cosmos,* 242.

78   Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1*, 351; Rahner, *The Trinity*, 103–15.

79   Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), 236.

80   Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol.1. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 300-319.

suggesting that each of the three tracks of deity simultaneously manifest partly as distinct consciousnesses, where one is had by each of the tracks. Which position should be preferred is not for me to judge here, however since my model allows for both it should be deemed acceptable by either camp.

For omni-attributes a similar response can be given, since my model needs to account for each person possessing the same attributes, that of being almighty, eternal, and uncreated, as affirmed in the creeds. Again, my model can say either that there is only one set of attributes, shared by the manifestations, or that there are three sets of identical attributes. Beginning with the first option, one can mimic Leftow in holding that for 'LT, all deifying attributes primarily belong to God, the sole substance of the Trinity. God is equally the 'substrate' of all Persons he constitutes or all events of his cognitive and affective life. So his deifying attributes exist equally in all three Persons.'[81] Hence, on my view all deifying attributes belong to deity, and since each of the persons just is a multi-track manifestation of deity, all the attributes of deity, other than the relations which make the manifestations distinct, belong to each person. However, one could take the second option by employing another thesis defended by a number of power theorists who claim that an activated power may cause further powers to come about. In this case since the manifestation of a power brings about further powers, what will be brought about in this instance are distinct omni-attributes for each manifestation track. Again, I do not judge here which option is to be preferred, but just note that my account allows for either.

## POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

There may, however, be potential problems looming for my account. Rejecting one of the five theses explicated above would render my account useless since it relies on these. As explained previously, this isn't the place to defend these theses, and therefore my account should be taken to counterfactually propose, if these theses are true then I can give a coherent account of the Trinity, where this paper has sought to show the consequent, something I still deem a significant and worthwhile endeavour.

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81    Leftow, 'Anti Social Trinitarianism', 87.

A second concern comes from thinking there is an unwanted item within my ontology, deity, which might be thought to give me a Quaternity rather than a Trinity. I think this worry is misplaced, since on my view deity just is the three manifestation tracks in actuality and is nothing distinct from these. This is evident through thesis three which holds, power X in actuality is the same power as power X in potentiality. Further, since deity cannot but manifest, deity is never in potentiality but always in actuality, and therefore there is nothing to deity other than its three simultaneous continual manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The final concern for my model is that it is modalistic. This might seem especially so since it uses the term 'manifestation', and some explications of modalism employ this exact phraseology. For instance, Giles Emery writes, modalists see 'only *modes* of manifestation of the same one God. The same God manifests Himself sometimes as Father, sometimes as Son (in the incarnation), sometimes as Holy Spirit (in the Church).'[82] Likewise Hugh Turner suggests that for modalists, 'the three Persons are assigned the status of modes or manifestations of the one divine being: the one God is substantial, the three differentiations adjectival.'[83] Whilst both explications use the language of manifestations, it still isn't clear to others and myself exactly what modalism amounts to.[84]

Due to this, and for simplicity, I shall take the popular academic book *Christian Theology* by Alister McGrath, as providing an account of modalism that I shall work from. McGrath suggests there are two types of modalism, chronological and functional. He writes,

> *Chronological modalism* holds that God was Father at one point in history; that God was then Son at another point; and, finally, that God was Spirit. God thus appears in different modes at different times. … [Whilst] *Functional modalism* holds that God operates in different ways at the present moment, and that the three persons refer to these different modes of action.[85]

It seems clear to me that my model is not chronologically modalistic, since it claims all the persons of the Trinity, due to the multi-track nature of deity, are

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82    Emery, *The Trinity*, 60.

83    Hugh E. W. Turner, (1983) 'Modalism', in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Westminster, 1983), 375.

84    Leftow, 'Latin Trinity', 326-27.

85    Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* 5th ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 245.

simultaneously and eternally present. One manifestation does not cease for the next to occur, rather all manifestations occur simultaneously for eternity.

Perhaps my view is closer to functional modalism, where functional modalism holds, 'God acts as creator (and we call this "Father"); God acts as redeemer (and we call this "Son"); God acts as sanctifier (and we call this the "Holy Spirit"). The persons of the Trinity thus refer to different divine functions.'[86] Yet my account doesn't say the persons of the trinity are different functions of the trope deity. Rather my account holds that the one trope deity has three manifestations, since it is a multi-track power, where each of these just is the trope deity in actuality. Therefore, my position holds that the manifestations are both eternal and necessary, thereby avoiding the errors of Sabellianism. The account also suggests that we should think of the three manifestations, each as persons, although as I noted earlier, I leave the notion of personhood largely unexplained. Further, my view allows that the Son can pray to the Father without praying to Himself, since even though Father and Son share the same trope deity, they are distinct because they are different tracks of the manifestation of deity. This is especially evident as my account allows for distinct consciousnesses, and therefore the consciousness of the praying Son would be distinct from the Father's hearing consciousness. Given this, I don't take my model to be modalistic, at least on McGrath's construal of modalism.

## CONCLUSION

'For the Christian, the true "Theory of Everything" is Trinitarian theology,'[87] and this paper has attempted to provide a LT model of this doctrine. My model affirms (1), since there is only one God due to there being only one deity trope. It also holds (2) as it claims Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all deity in actuality. Yet it further supports (3), since Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identical because their manifestations are different, thanks to deity being multi-track with differing manifestation conditions. Finally, my conception upholds (4), since the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each just the

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86    Ibid.

87    John Polkinghorne, 'The Demise of Democritus', in *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, ed. by John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 12.

multi-track manifestation of the deity trope in actuality. If this is all correct then my model is successful in providing another LT account. However, one might suggest the theses don't combine as I hoped, or worse, that some of them are false. Perhaps a stronger accusation might be made suggesting that if my model follows from these theses, then this should be taken as a *reductio* of at least one of them. As stated previously, showing these theses to be true is one task too many for an already ambitious paper, and therefore demonstrating this model to be entirely satisfactory requires further metaphysical work. Nevertheless, since I take the possibility of these theses for granted, I rest somewhat content with my more limited conclusion.

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# HASKER ON THE DIVINE PROCESSIONS
# OF THE TRINITARIAN PERSONS

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**Abstract.** Within contemporary evangelical theology, a peculiar controversy has been brewing over the past few decades with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. A good number of prominent evangelical theologians and philosophers are rejecting the doctrine of divine processions within the eternal life of the Trinity.[1] In William Hasker's recent *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, Hasker laments this rejection and seeks to offer a defense of this doctrine. This paper shall seek to accomplish a few things. In section I, I shall first set the stage for a proper understanding of the discussion. Section II will articulate the basic Trinitarian desiderata that must be satisfied by any model of the doctrine of the Trinity. This will help one understand the debate between Hasker and the procession deniers. Section III will offer an articulation of what the doctrine of divine processions teaches. Section IV will examine Hasker's defense of the doctrine point by point. I shall argue that his defense of the doctrine of the divine processions fails.

## I. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

In order to have a proper understanding of the debate contained within this paper, I need to set the stage. In particular, I need to limit the focus of this debate in order to make it easier to engage. Also, I need to explain a key term — Social Trinitarianism.

### Limiting the Focus

Anyone familiar with contemporary Trinitarian discussions within theology and philosophy of religion will know that there are many different issues, positions, and debates to be considered. For ease of exposition, I must limit

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1    For a full list of such evangelicals see Kevin N. Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 30–33.

the focus of my paper. I will treat Hasker and those who deny the doctrine of divine processions as all committed to Social Trinitarianism. In other words, I shall treat this as an in-house debate between Social Trinitarians. Though not all procession deniers are Social Trinitarians, one of Hasker's main dialogue partners is — i.e. Keith Yandell. For the purposes of this paper, call any view of the Trinity that denies the doctrine of divine processions the Yandellian view. The substantive agreements and disagreements between Hasker and Yandell over how to understand the basics of Trinitarian doctrine shape Hasker's defense of the doctrine of divine processions, as well as shape the dialectic of the debate. Throughout the remainder of this paper, I shall focus on this disagreement between Hasker and the Yandellian view. I shall argue that the Yandellian view is preferable to Hasker's view because the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity.

### What is Social Trinitarianism?

In contemporary theology, Social Trinitarianism has come to be associated with a whole assortment of theological doctrines, political ideologies, and ecumenical propositions.[2] However, Social Trinitarianism need not be, and perhaps should not be, associated with any particular sociopolitical agenda as it so often has in the past.[3] Hasker and Yandell agree that Social Trinitarianism is, at its core, a purely metaphysical and theological doctrine. So for the purposes of this paper I shall treat Social Trinitarianism solely as a metaphysical and theological claim.

What is this metaphysical and theological claim? More will be said on this below, but for now it will be helpful to get a short answer to this question. Hasker explains that Social Trinitarians believe in three robust divine persons. By this he means that there are three centers of consciousness, each with their own unique will, within the Godhead. The term 'robust persons' has become a phrase used by Social Trinitarians to distinguish their view from other models of the Trinity. For instance, on Barth's model of the Trinity the divine persons are simply modes of God. Another example comes from various classical models of the Trinity where there is only one mind and one will

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2    Gijsbert van den Brink, "Social Trinitarianism: A Discussion of Some Recent Theological Criticisms", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014).

3    Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Eerdmans 2010), 224–27.

in the Godhead.[4] Also, Social Trinitarians wish to distinguish themselves from certain Thomistic models of the Trinity where the divine persons simply are relations; not persons or things that stand in relations, but simply relations.[5]

Hasker and Yandell both agree that a proper doctrine of the Trinity must involve three robust divine persons. Further, both agree to a basic set of Trinitarian desiderata that must be satisfied by any model of the Trinity. These desiderata will be discussed in the next section.

## II. TRINITARIAN DESIDERATA

In order to understand the debate between Hasker and Yandell, one must understand a few things first. In particular, one must understand the basics of the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as the doctrine of the divine processions. In this section I shall consider the basics of the doctrine of the Trinity, and leave the doctrine of divine processions till the next section.

What are these Trinitarian desiderata? There are several desiderata that are necessary for constructing the doctrine of the Trinity. The basic claim of this doctrine is that the Christian God is three persons in one essence. This can be broken down into four claims:

(T1)   There are three divine persons.

(T2)   The divine persons are not numerically identical to each other.

(T3)   Homoousios: The divine persons share the same divine essence.

(T4)   Monotheism: The divine persons are related in such a way that there is only one God, and not three Gods.

I take these four desiderata to be common among Trinitarians of various stripes in the Christian tradition after the development of the Nicene Creed. I must emphasize *after the Nicene Creed* because not all Trinitarians in the early Church were happy with the term *homoousios* when it was first introduced.

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4    E.g. Keith Ward, *Christ and the Cosmos: A Reformulation of Trinitarian Doctrine* (CUP, 2015). The Socinians referred to such views as "Nominal Trinitarianism." See Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians* (OUP, 2008), 165.

5    Paul S. Fiddes, "Relational Trinity: Radical Perspective", in ed. Jason S. Sexton, *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Zondervan, 2014), 159.

The way I have stated these desiderata are intentionally minimal so as to allow for multiple models of the Trinity to be articulated and examined. How one unpacks (T1)–(T4) will shape one's overall doctrine of the Christian God. For the purposes of this paper, I am primarily interested in how Hasker and Yandell understand these desiderata.

How does Hasker understand (T1)–(T4)? How does he seek to satisfy the Trinitarian desiderata? Hasker unpacks (T1) by saying that a person is a center of consciousness, knowledge, will, love, and action.[6] Since there are three persons in the Trinity, there are three centers of consciousness, knowledge, will, love, and action. Given this understanding of Trinitarian persons, one can see how Hasker can maintain (T2). The divine persons are not numerically identical to each other because there are three numerically distinct centers of consciousness, each with their own unique will, love, and action.

Hasker notes that Social Trinitarians are divided on how to cash out (T3) and (T4). One such way to cash out (T3) is to take the divine essence to be an abstract set of properties. This is the approach taken by Yandell. This can be stated as

(T3')  Homoousios: Each divine person has all of the necessary and suf-
        ficient properties for being divine.

Hasker notes that another possible way to take the divine essence is to conceive it as a concrete particular. On this conception, there is one divine substance that somehow gives rise to three distinct centers of consciousness, each with their own distinct will.[7] This position would agree, in part, with (T3'), but would add an additional qualifying claim.

(T3")  Homoousios: A) Each divine person has all of the necessary and
        sufficient properties for being divine, and B) each of the divine
        persons shares in the one concrete divine substance.

Hasker opts for (T3"), and criticizes those who only go for (T3'). How one cashes out (T4) will depend on if one opts for (T3') or (T3"). For Hasker, (T4) is best captured by (T3"). There is one immaterial substance that sustains three distinct persons. This plus the doctrine of the divine processions, says Hasker, is enough to secure a type of divine unity that is compatible with the monotheism of the New Testament. Someone like Yandell will hold to (T3'), and explain

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6    William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (OUP, 2013), 22–3.
7    Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, chapter 27.

that (T4) can be secured without appealing to the doctrine of the divine processions. Yandell gives 4 factors that must be satisfied for (T4) to obtain.[8]

(T4a)  For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P exist and either of the other Trinitarian persons not exist.

(T4b)  For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P will what is not willed by the other Trinitarian persons.

(T4c)  For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P engage in any activity in which the other Trinitarian persons in no way engage.

(T4d)  The persons of the Trinity have complete non-inferential awareness of one another.

By "logically impossible", Yandell means broadly logically impossible, or metaphysically impossible. In other words, it is of the essence of the divine persons to be strongly internally related to one another such that they cannot exist apart from each other.[9]

Hasker is in agreement with much of what Yandell has to say here. However, Hasker disagrees with Yandell on (T3'). This will be relevant later with regard to Hasker's disagreement with Yandell over the doctrine of divine processions. Again, Yandell denies the doctrine of divine processions, whilst Hasker affirms the doctrine. Hasker thinks that the divine processions somehow secures *homoousios*. Further, Hasker claims that somehow *homoousios* and the divine processions entail (T4). Throughout the remainder of this paper I shall focus on this disagreement between Hasker and the Yandellian view. As stated before, I shall argue that the Yandellian view is preferable to Hasker's view because the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity. In particular, the doctrine of divine processions violates both the (T3') and (T3") renderings of *homoousios*, and (T4). Before arguing this, it must be made clear what the doctrine of divine processions is.

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8    Keith Yandell, "How Many Times Does Three Go Into One?" in eds. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea, *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity* (OUP, 2009), 168.

9    Thomas H. McCall, "Relational Trinity: Creedal Perspective", in Sexton, *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 132.

## III. WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE PROCESSIONS?

The doctrine of divine processions seems largely misunderstood among contemporary philosophers of religion prompting a recent book length treatment of the doctrine.[10] Here is an attempt to clear up the confusion. The doctrine of divine processions can be broken down into two different claims. First, the Father eternally generates the Son. Another way to state this is that the Son is eternally begotten by the Father. Second, the Father, or the Father and the Son, eternally spirate the Holy Spirit. Another common way of stating this is that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father, or the Father and the Son.[11] This much is well understood. What does not seem to be well understood in contemporary philosophy of religion is what these terms mean. What do 'begotten' and 'proceed' mean in this context?

To get a better understanding of these Trinitarian terms, one must look to the early patristic debates and ecumenical creeds. The first ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325 sets the context for understanding these terms in subsequent theological debates. The Creed of Nicaea of 325 states that the Son was "begotten of the Father…begotten, not made." It affirms that the Son is of the same essence of the Father. The Creed denies that the Son is a created, or made, thing. Further, it denies that there was a time when the Son did not exist. The Creed makes a distinction between 'begotten' on the one hand, and 'made' or 'created' on the other. The teaching of the Creed is that if the Son is begotten of the Father, He can be of the same essence as the Father. If the Son is made or created, He cannot be of the same essence as the Father. According to Origen, Eusebius, the pro-Nicene theologians, and later classical Christian theologians who affirm the Nicene Creed, this relation of begottenness is a communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son.[12] This is because the Father is the source, or fount, of divinity who *causes* the Son to be divine.[13] The Father

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10    I.e. Giles, *Eternal Generation*. Other than Hasker, I am aware of a few notable exceptions among contemporary philosophers of religion who seem to understand the doctrine. In particular, Richard Swinburne and Paul Helm. See Swinburne, *The Christian God* (OUP, 1994), chapter 8. Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time, 2nd Edition* (OUP, 2010), chapter 15.

11    Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book* I, XI-XIII.

12    Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 223.

13    For a thorough discussion of this issue see Giles, *Eternal Generation*, chapters 5–7. The claim that the Father's causal activity explains the Son's existence and divine essence goes back

alone is the self-subsistent divinity by nature; God from no other source than Himself. It is the Son's derivation from the Father that causes the Son to exist and be divine.[14]

It should be emphasized that the concept of 'begotten' at play in this creed and in the early Trinitarian debates is causal, not metaphorical. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa in *On Not Three Gods* states that, "The principle of causality distinguishes, then, the Persons of the holy Trinity. It affirms that the one is uncaused, while the other depends on the cause."[15] Terms like 'begotten' and 'made' are both causal, but there is a slight difference that quickly became obscured in these early debates due, in part, to the similar spelling in the Greek. As Alasdair Heron explains, the term 'begotten' (Greek: *gennetos*) in the Creed is intended to denote "that which has a cause or source outside itself." This causal source could be a something, or in the case of the Trinity, someone. This need not involve the begotten thing coming into existence according to the pro-Nicene theologians. The term 'created' or 'made' (Greek: *genetos*), however, is intended to denote "that which has come into being."[16] So the creedal teaching affirms that the Son is caused to exist by the Father, but in such a way that the Son never came into being. Whereas the Father alone is unbegotten/uncaused (Greek: *agenetos/agennetos*), and is the source and cause of the Trinity.[17]

This causal concept is not only contained in the Creed of Nicaea, it is also in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed or Nicene Creed of 381. As Christopher Beeley points out, the Nicene Creed that is developed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 bears a close resemblance to the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus. This is understandable since Gregory was the presiding president of the Council.[18] In Gregory's Trinitarian theology, the Father alone is the unoriginated or uncaused being. The Father timelessly causes the Son to exist such that the Son is also timeless. Even though the Son is caused to exist, the Son does not begin to exist because the Son is begotten and not created or made.

at least to Origen. Cf. Christopher A. Beeley, *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (Yale Univ. Press, 2012), 23, 90–93.

14   Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 70–71.

15   Cf. Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Baker Academic, 2011), 190–91.

16   Alasdair I. C. Heron, 'Homoousios with the Father', in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, (Handsel, 1981), 60–61.

17   Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations* 3.3.

18   Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 195–96.

Since the Son is eternally begotten, the Son is co-eternal with the Father.[19] Gregory's theology here is deeply traditional, and goes back at least to the Alexandrian traditions of Origen and Eusebius.[20] This is the understanding of 'eternally begotten' that is agreed upon by the Council of Constantinople, and written into the Nicene Creed. As Stephen Holmes makes clear, the claim is that "the Father is the personal cause of the Son", and because of this "they share the same nature."[21]

The second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381 not only affirms that the Father is the cause of the Son. It also extends this teaching to the Holy Spirit. The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 adds that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The idea here is that 'proceeds', like 'begotten', does not mean made or created. It is intended to be an affirmation that the Spirit is of the same essence as the Father and Son. 'Proceeds' with regard to the Holy Spirit functions metaphysically the same way as 'begotten' does. The Holy Spirit is caused to exist in such a way that the Holy Spirit never began to exist, but instead eternally exists.

What is important to note is that this causal concept was at play in the East and West in both the early and medieval Church.[22] Current patristic scholarship points out that there is no fundamental difference between the East and the West over the doctrine of the Trinity, expect with regards to the *filioque* controversy.[23] This is a later debate over whether or not the Father alone causes the Holy Spirit to exist, or if the Father and the Son together cause the Holy Spirit to exist. According to Holmes, what all sides agree upon during the patristic era is that "within the divine life, the Father is the sole cause, begetting the Son and spirating the Spirit."[24]

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19   Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations* 3.3.
20   Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 23, and 90–93.
21   Homles, *Quest for the Trinity*, 113.
22   See Richard Cross, 'Latin Trinitarianism: Some Conceptual and Historical Considerations', in M. Rea, Th. McCall, *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*. Michel R. Barnes, 'The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language', in eds. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (T&T Clark, 1993). Rory Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought* (OUP, 2006), 56.
23   Stephen Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 129–31, and 146.
24   Holmes, *Quest for the Trinity*, 146–46.

The concern of the patristics is that without this causal sequence from the Father, there would be three first principles, or three Gods.[25] The Father alone is the first principle. The Father is "the cause and source of the Trinitarian communion."[26] Somehow the Father's volitional activity to bring about the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit is such that the Son and Holy Spirit perfectly share in the divine nature. Somehow the Father's causal activity guarantees the full divinity of the Son and Spirit, as well as the unity of the three such that there is one God and not three gods.

On all this Hasker seems to be in agreement. He maintains that "God the Father eternally communicates the totality of the one undivided divine nature to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and in so doing brings about the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit."[27] The Father brings this about through His own causal activity.[28] Further, Hasker shares the worry that without the doctrine of the divine processions we would have three "ultimate sources of being." This, according to Hasker, would violate the monotheism of (T4).[29] However, there is one area where Hasker deviates from the traditional doctrine of the divine processions — divine eternality.

Anyone who is familiar with Hasker's work knows that Hasker rejects divine timelessness.[30] As such, Hasker must interpret the divine processions in a way that is compatible with divine temporality. This is not something that Hasker attempts to do. In fact, Hasker seems to be unaware of this challenge; but it most certainly is a challenge.

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25   Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 110. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (CUP, 2010), 264–65.

26   Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 264.

27   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 220.

28   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 220. In footnote 14, Hasker says that his use of "brings about" is a general term for an agent actualizing a state of affairs. He says that causation is one species of bringing about. He doesn't specify what another species of bringing about is, so I assume that he intends causation to be the meaning of his usage of "bringing about." However, he does offer a quote from Louis Berkhof where Berkhof says that the Father is the ground of the Son. So it is possible that Hasker could mean some kind of grounding relation that the Father brings about. If Hasker means this instead, he should clarify. I address the possibility of the Father grounding the Son below.

29   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 161.

30   William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1989).

Paul Helm has argued that divine temporality is incompatible with the doctrine of the divine processions because it entails Arianism.[31] Part of the argument focuses on one of the central complaints of divine temporalists against atemporalists — the impossibility of timeless causes. As Helm rightly points out, the doctrine of eternal generation rests on the possibility of timeless causes with timeless effects in order to secure the claim that the Father and Son are co-eternal. Following Richard Swinburne, Helm notes that a common claim from divine temporalists is that all causes must be temporally prior to their effects. So if the Father causes the Son to exist, the Father will be temporally prior to the Son. What this means is that there will be a time when the Son did not exist, which is one early version of Arianism! Elsewhere I have offered a full examination and refutation of Helm's argument.[32] I'm not certain how Hasker will respond to this sort of argument. I do know that Hasker cannot help himself to my solution to Helm's objection since my solution involves rejecting the doctrine of divine processions.

I mention this problem because it helps illuminate the theological context of the doctrine of divine processions. In the Creeds, and in church history, the doctrine of divine processions is couched in terms of divine timelessness. Kevin Giles points out the role that divine timelessness plays in the doctrine of the processions.[33] For example, one of the early Arian arguments is that all causes must have temporal effects.[34] The Father is timeless. The Father causes the Son to exist, so the Son must be temporal. So the Son and the Father cannot be *homoousios* because they have different essential properties. This is also closely related to the popular Arian slogan, "There was a time when the Son was not." The move made by Athanasius, the Council of Nicaea, and those at the Council of Constantinople is that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the effect is also timeless. When the Nicene

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31   Paul Helm, 'Eternal Creation', *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994). Helm, 'Time and Trinity', in *Questions of Time and Tense,* ed. Robin Le Poidevin (Clarendon Press, 1998). Helm, 'Is God Bound by Time?' in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Zondervan, 2002). Helm, *Eternal God.*
32   R.T. Mullins, "divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism", *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016).
33   Giles, *Eternal Generation*, 108. This claim is reinforced at Constantinople II. See Ricard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553, Vol. 1* (Liverpool Univ. Press, 2009), 143.
34   However, Christopher Beeley has argued that Arius in fact held no such thing. It was the invention of Alexander and Athanasius. *The Unity of Christ*, 110–124.

Creed of 381 states that the Son was "begotten of the Father before all ages", it is affirming that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the Son is also timeless. It is affirming that the Father-Son relationship is a timeless cause with a timeless effect. Recall from above that to be 'made' is to be caused to exist in such a way that one begins to exist. The doctrine of eternal begottenness is intended to avoid this Arian pitfall. Since Hasker rejects the doctrine of divine timelessness, it is not clear how he can avoid this Arian pitfall if he remains committed to the doctrine of the divine processions.

That said, I think that the doctrine of divine processions can be summarized as follows. The doctrine of divine processions states that the Father is the source or fount of divinity. God the Father causes the Son to exist in such a way that (a) the Son is fully divine, (b) the Father and the Son are the same essence, and (c) the Father and the Son are of equal ontological status. After the *filioque* controversy, Western Christians hold that the Father and the Son together cause the Holy Spirit to exist such that (d) the Holy Spirit is fully divine, (e) the Holy Spirit is the same essence as the Father and the Son, and (f) the Holy Spirit is of equal ontological status with the Father and the Son. In the East, Christians deny the *filioque* addition to the creed and say that the Father alone causes the Holy Spirit to exist such that (d)–(f) obtain. Again, this is all framed in terms of divine timelessness.

## IV. CRITIQUING HASKER'S DEFENSE OF THE DIVINE PROCESSIONS

*Why Does Hasker Want to Defend the Doctrine of the divine Processions?*

Why would Hasker want to defend the doctrine of divine processions? Hasker disagrees with the typical reasons that Yandellians appeal to in their rejection of divine procession which focus on biblical and philosophical arguments.[35] He claims that the doctrine of the eternal processions in God is crucial to

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35    There are two broad types of reasons that Hasker notes. First, Yandellians claim that the doctrine has an incredibly weak biblical basis. Second, Yandellians claim that the doctrine of divine processions is unintelligible and impossible. For the biblical arguments see John Feinberg and Harold Brown, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Crossway Books, 2001), 488–92. Also my, "divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism." For arguments of the second sort, see the rest of this paper.

developing the doctrine of the Trinity.[36] Hasker offers three broad reasons for why Christians should continue to hold to the doctrine of divine processions.

First, Hasker claims that the doctrine of divine processions is needed to establish the unity of the divine persons such that (T4) obtains. He argues that without the doctrine of divine processions, the Yandellian cannot offer a satisfying account of divine unity. Second, Hasker argues that without the divine processions, the Yandellian cannot explain why there are only three divine persons instead of 4 or more. Third, Hasker argues that a providential God would not allow the Church to get something as fundamental as the doctrine of divine processions wrong. The Yandellian, according to Hasker, must explain how a providential God would allow the Church and the ecumenical creeds to botch up the doctrine of the Trinity.

In what follows below, I shall develop Hasker's thoughts and argue that Hasker is mistaken. The doctrine of divine processions is not needed to develop the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, I shall argue that the doctrine of divine processions prevents us from satisfying the basic Trinitarian desiderata.

### Are the Processions Needed to Maintain the Trinity in Unity? No, it Destroys divine Unity Because it Entails Subordination.

Within Trinitarian discourse, subordinationism is another term for Arianism. Arianism is an incredibly fuzzy label applied to a broad and diverse group of thinkers in the early Church.[37] Despite the diversity within Arianism, there seems to be one consistent theme that unites them — a denial of *homoousios*. Arians hold that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all divine, but deny that they are of the same essence. This is because the Father alone is God. The Son and Spirit are lesser, subordinate, divine beings. For the Arians, all of this follows from the doctrine of the divine processions. To be clear, the Arians are in full agreement with the Orthodox that the Father causes the Son and Spirit to exist. The difference between the two positions is over the entailments of the doctrine of divine processions. Not all Arians hold to the claim that there was a time when the Son was not. Later Arians were in agreement with the Orthodox that the Father eternally generates the Son such that the Son is co-eternal

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36   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, chapter 26.
37   Rebecca Lyman, "A Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism", in eds. Barnes and Williams, *Arianism After Arius*.

with the Father.[38] So the Nicene distinction between begotten and made is of little value when it comes to avoiding the arguments of later Arians that came after the development of the Nicene Creed.

In contemporary Trinitarian discourse, the charge of subordinationism is leveled against any view that entails a denial of *homoousios*. Another way of stating this is to say that a view is subordinationist if it entails that the divine persons are not equally divine.[39] A view entails subordinationism if it says that the Son and Spirit are of a lesser divine status than the Father. If the Son or Spirit are eternally ontologically subordinate to the Father, then the persons are not of the same essence.[40] A Yandellian will argue that the doctrine of divine processions entails subordinationism. In other words, the claim is that the divine processions entails that (T3), (T3'), and (T3") are false.

Hasker tries to argue that the processions in no way imply subordination. His arguments are a bit quick and odd. First, he tries to assuage any concern that the processions imply subordination by pointing out that the fathers of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries did not seem to be concerned with establishing the full equality of the Son.[41] Then he asserts that the doctrine of divine processions is what guarantees that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal. He offers very little by way of argument for this claim.

I have two brief comments at this point in the discussion. First, it is false that the fathers of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries were not concerned with establishing the full equality of the Son. For instance, Origen made significant efforts to establish the full equality of the Son with the Father in light of various contemporary heresies.[42] Origen, like Hasker, claims that the generation of the Son guarantees that the Father and the Son are equal. How does generation guarantee this? Origen does not explain how eternal generation guarantees this. Instead, he punts to ineffable mystery, and this becomes the standard move throughout Church history.[43] In Church tradition, appeals are even

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38   Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (OUP, 2004), 117.

39   Thomas D. Senor, "The Doctrine of the Trinity is Coherent", in *Debating Christian Theism*, eds. J.P. Moreland, Chad Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis (OUP, 2013), 336.

40   McCall, *Which Trinity?*, chapter 6.

41   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 218–19.

42   Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, chapter 1.

43   Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 3.8. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XV.47. Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book I*, IX.2.1.

made to Isaiah 53:8 to justify this use of ineffable mystery. The early Church fathers translated this passage as "who can speak of his generation?"[44] Which brings me to my second brief comment. Second, simply asserting that the divine processions guarantees the full equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does nothing to assuage any concerns of subordinationism. I think it is incredibly telling that Origen's appeals to ineffable mystery did nothing to stem the coming tide of subordinationist theology in subsequent generations. The doctrine of eternal generation was one of several major motivations for subordinationist theology in the early Church.

Hasker seems somewhat aware of this fact since he considers some objections to the *homoousios* doctrine from the late Arian theologian Eunomius.[45] Eunomius developed several clear objections to the *homoousios* doctrine based upon the divine processions.[46] However, Hasker's discussion of Eunomius' arguments is a bit quick. He basically just asserts that the Cappadocians defeated Eunomius' objections to the *homoousios* doctrine, and refuted Eunomius' claim that subordinationism is true. Then he asserts that we have to hold to the doctrine of divine processions lest we be tritheists.[47] This is a standard assertion in contemporary theology, but I shall argue that the assertion is dubious at best.

Hasker considers two of Eunomius' objections, and offers an insufficient reply to each. In this section I shall consider the first Eunomian argument, and save the second Eunomian argument for a later section.

The first Eunomian argument is that to be God is to be unbegotten. The Father is unbegotten, so the Father is God. The Son is begotten, so the Son is not God. Hasker explains that the Cappadocians responded by pointing out that 'Unbegotten' only denotes a personal property of the Father, and does not denote a property of the divine essence.[48] This was a poor response when the Cappadocians offered it, and it is a poor response now. The argument is actually quite a bit more powerful than Hasker and many contemporary theologians realize, and it can be strengthened in several interesting ways as I shall now demonstrate.

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44    Holmes, *Quest for the Trinity*, 41.
45    Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 219.
46    Eunomius, *The Extant Works*, ed. Richard P. Vaggione (OUP, 1987), 59 and 183.
47    Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 219.
48    Ibid.

Recall from above (T3') and (T3"). Both share the condition that no being can be divine unless that being has all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. A typical list of necessary and sufficient properties for being divine will include omnipotence, omniscience, eternality, and perfect goodness. But, for the purposes of this paper, I wish to focus on two particular divine attributes — aseity and self-sufficiency. The traditional claim is that no being can be divine unless that being exists *a se* and is self-sufficient.

However, there is sometimes a bit of confusion surrounding these doctrines. The main confusion is that aseity and self-sufficiency are often conflated in contemporary discussions, though they are distinguished in older theological texts. Sometimes the conflation seems to derive from a commitment to the doctrine of divine simplicity which would entail that all of the divine attributes are identical to one another and identical to God.[49] In other words, if God is simple, aseity and self-sufficiency are identical. I think that we have good reason for rejecting the doctrine of divine simplicity. Elsewhere I have argued that divine simplicity is metaphysically impossible, and that it is incompatible with divine freedom, aseity, and self-sufficiency.[50] Further, Hasker and Yandell both deny divine simplicity. So we should not let that doctrine bring about any more confusion within our theology than it already has.

For the sake of doctrinal clarity, aseity and self-sufficiency should be taken as distinct divine attributes. Both express God's ultimacy in reality, as well as establish that God is distinguished from creatures.[51] However, each attribute expresses this in a different way. Aseity is closely related to the necessary existence of God. God's necessary existence means that God cannot fail to exist, or that God exists in all possible worlds. Aseity captures the notion that God not only exists necessarily, but that God is an uncaused being. The word *a se* quite literally means 'from itself' or 'by itself'. A being who exists *a*

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49   Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Zondervan, 2013), 128. Thomas Williams, "Introduction to Classical Theism", in *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, eds. Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher (Springer, 2013), 96. William E. Mann, "divine Sovereignty and Aseity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion,* ed. William J. Wainwright (OUP, 2005), 36.

50   R.T. Mullins, "Simply Impossible: A Case Against divine Simplicity", *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013). R.T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (OUP, 2016).

51   Paul M. Gould, "Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects", in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects,* ed. Paul M. Gould (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1–3.

*se* is self-existent, and in no way has its existence from, nor dependent upon, anything else.[52] Whilst aseity is a claim about God's existence, self-sufficiency is a claim about God's essence. A being who is self-sufficient is a being whose essence, or nature, is in no way dependent upon or derived from anything else. Whilst I think that these divine attributes are necessarily co-extensive, it seems best to me to distinguish these attributes since they are not identical because they are about different things. Again, aseity is about God's existence, whereas self-sufficiency is about God's essence. These attributes can be given the following definitions:

> *Aseity*: A being exists *a se* if and only if its existence is not dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself.

> *Self-sufficiency:* A being is self-sufficient if and only if its essential nature is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself.

These attributes are necessary for a being to be divine. God, according to Christian theism, is ultimate in reality. Aseity and self-sufficiency capture the Creator/creature distinction and provide a natural way for explicating divine ultimacy. Hasker seems to be in full agreement on this point since he claims that God is a necessary being, and His existence and nature in no way depend upon anything outside of Himself.[53] Instead, everything else that exists depends upon God for its existence and nature.

As noted above, and as Hasker rightly admits, 'begotten' is a causal notion. The Eunomian argument is that to be God is to be unbegotten. Unbegotten (Greek: *agenetos*) means that one does not have a cause for one's existence. To be God is to be uncaused. To be God is to exist *a se* — to not have one's existence derived from, nor dependent on, another. Given Hasker's statements about divine necessity, he is committed to the claim that God exists *a se*.[54] So with the doctrines of aseity and self-sufficiency before us, the Eunomian argument can be restated in a more powerful way as follows.

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52   J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 502–03. Cf. John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 239–43. Gregory Fowler, "Simplicity or Priority?" in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 6,* ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (OUP, 2015), 115.

53   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 171–75.

54   Ibid., 173–5, and 222.

One of the necessary properties for being divine is aseity. The Father is unbegotten/uncaused. The Father does not have a cause for His existence. The Father exists *a se*. If in order to be divine a being must exist *a se*, it would seem that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not divine. The Son is caused to exist by the Father. The Holy Spirit is caused to exist by the Father and the Son. The Son and the Holy Spirit have their being derived from the Father. No being that exists *a se*, by definition, has its existence derived from another. The Son and the Holy Spirit have their existence derived from another, and as such are not *a se*. The Son and the Holy Spirit lack the divine property of aseity. Since the Son and the Holy Spirit lack the property of aseity, they are not divine.

If this were not bad enough, the Son and the Holy Spirit also lack the divine property of self-sufficiency. A being is self-sufficient if and only if its essential nature is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself. The Father is self-sufficient. The divine essence of the Father in no way depends upon, nor is derived from, anything outside of Himself. As Hasker rightly puts it, the doctrine of the divine processions involves the Father giving the divine essence to the Son and Spirit.[55] When the Father causes the Son and Spirit to exist, the Father somehow causes the Son and the Spirit to have the divine essence. But this violates self-sufficiency. No being that is divine has its essence derived from, nor dependent upon, anything outside of itself. The Son and the Spirit have their essence derived from the Father. The essence of the Son and the Spirit is dependent upon the causal activity of the Father. The Son and the Spirit are not self-sufficient, so the Son and the Spirit are not divine.

Since the Son and the Holy Spirit lack the properties of aseity and self-sufficiency, (T3) is false. The Son and the Holy Spirit are not *homoousios* with the Father since they lack two of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. This also entails that (T3') and (T3") are false since each claims that the divine persons have all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. The Son and the Holy Spirit do not have all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. Since (T3), (T3'), and (T3") are false, (T4) is false. The truth of (T4) depends upon the truth of (T3). If the persons are not all divine, the persons cannot form a unity such that there is one God. Contrary to what Hasker asserts, the doctrine of the divine processions does not maintain divine unity. Instead, it crumbles beneath the weight of the Eunomian objection.

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55   Ibid., 220.

*Is There a Possible Rejoinder for Hasker?*

Maybe someone will say that Hasker has a possible rejoinder. What if Hasker decides to part ways a bit with patristic theology and drop the causal notion of generation and procession? In other words, Hasker could decide to deviate from the creedal teachings in order to maintain something *similar* to the creedal teachings that attempts to capture the spirit of the Creed if not the letter. Perhaps he could follow certain medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas or John Duns Scotus who make this move.

Late medieval theologians have several points in common with Hasker, so at first glance this seems like a fruitful line of defense. First, various medieval theologians agree with Hasker that (T3") is the proper way to understand the *homoousios* doctrine. Second, they agree with Hasker that the divine essence is a necessary being that does not have a cause for its existence. The divine essence is not produced by anything *ad extra*.[56] Third, they agree that the Father produces the Son, or makes the Son exist. Somehow this production of the Son makes it the case that the Son shares in the divine essence. Yet they maintain that this production is timeless, and Hasker rejects divine timelessness.[57] However, I don't think that the differences over divine eternality really matter for dealing with this particular Eunomian argument. As noted above, it matters for dealing with Paul Helm's objection to divine temporality based upon the doctrine of eternal generation.

Will following the medievals help Hasker? No. Consider Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of divine procession first. For Aquinas, the Father does not cause the Son to exist because that entails subordinationism. Aquinas considers a couple of ways to understand this, and associates each with a particular heresy. For instance, one is the Arian understanding. "Some have understood it in the sense of an effect, proceeding from its cause; so Arius took it, saying that the Son proceeds from the Father as His primary creature, and that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son as the creature of both."[58]

However, even though Aquinas denies that the Father causes the Son to exist, he still maintains that the Son's existence is derived from the Father because

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56  J. T. Paasch, *divine Production in Late Medieval Trinitarian Theology: Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham*, (OUP, 2012), 17–20.

57  Paasch, *divine Production*, 28–9.

58  Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q27.1.

the Father is the 'principle' of the Son. Aquinas complains that the Greeks use the term 'principle' and 'cause' indifferently when speaking about God, whereas the Latins only use 'principle' to refer to God. As Aquinas explains, 'principle' has a wider meaning than 'cause.' Aquinas worries that 'cause' denotes a diversity of substance, and would attribute some sort of inferiority to the Son and Holy Spirit.[59] So Aquinas prefers to say that the Father is the principle of the Godhead — the one who produces the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father produces the Son. The Son receives His existence from the Father in such a way that the Son is equally divine with the Father, and in such a way that the two share the same substance.[60] Aquinas does the same with regard to the Holy Spirit. He says that the term "unbegotten" applies to the Father alone since only "He is not in any way derived from another." The Holy Spirit cannot be unbegotten because the Holy Spirit is derived from the Father by procession. Aquinas even echoes the concern of Nicaea that I noted above — if the Father is not the sole principle of the Trinity, we will have multiple Gods.[61]

What we have here in Aquinas, then, is the claim that the Father is the principle of the Son and Spirit. The Father alone does not have His existence derived from anything or anyone. The Son and Spirit, however, have their existence derived from the Father. So there is nothing here in Aquinas to defeat the objection. This does not solve the problem specified in my version of the Eunomian argument. Again, no being that is *a se* derives its existence from anything outside of itself. Aquinas maintains that the Son and Holy Spirit's existence is derived from the Father. So the Son and Holy Spirit are not *a se*. The Son and Holy Spirit are not divine.

So it appears that Aquinas is of no help to Hasker in answering my revamped Eunomian argument. Perhaps Hasker can look to other sources such

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59   Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q33.1.
60   Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q27.2. "Not everything derived from another has existence in another subject; otherwise we could not say that the whole substance of created being comes from God, since there is no subject that could receive the whole substance. So, then, what is generated in God receives its existence from the generator, not as though that existence were received into matter or into a subject (which would conflict with the divine self-subsistence); but when we speak of His existence as received, we mean that He Who proceeds receives divine existence from another; not, however, as if He were other from the divine nature. For in the perfection itself of the divine existence are contained both the Word intelligibly proceeding and the principle of the Word, with whatever belongs to His perfection."
61   Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q33.4.

as John Duns Scotus to develop a rejoinder. According to Richard Cross, Scotus denies that the Father causes the Son and the Spirit to exist. Instead, Scotus seems to be saying that the Father has some sort of ontological priority such that the Son is ontologically dependent upon the Father.[62] Cross points out that Scotus does little to explain what this ontological dependence means. JT Paasch notes, however, that Scotus is still affirming some sort of production. The Father produces the Son from His own essence such that the Son exists and shares in the divine essence.[63] Since this divine production in terms of ontological dependency is left rather vague, it might seem that this will be of little help to Hasker. However, it might be possible to state this ontological dependency in terms of the contemporary concept of grounding. So, one might say that the Son's existence is grounded in the Father such that the Son's existence depends upon the Father, yet the Father's existence does not depend upon the Son.[64]

It is not clear how this will help Hasker. One can easily imagine a ground of being theologian modifying the Eunomian argument in the following way. A ground of being theologian will cash out aseity in terms of grounding. To be divine is to be the ground of being of all other beings. To be divine is to be ungrounded. The Father is ungrounded, and is the ground of all other beings. As such, the Father is divine. The Son's being is grounded in the Father. As such, the Son is not divine. Again, we have done nothing to defeat the Eunomian argument.

Perhaps the medieval deviations from the creedal deposit are not radical enough to avoid the Eunomian argument. Maybe Hasker could look elsewhere to develop a rejoinder. John Calvin's discussion of aseity and the Trinity has garnered attention in recent years as it seems, according to its proponents, to be an important extension and clarification of Cappadocian Trinitarian thinking.[65] The move from Calvin, and those who follow suit, is not to deny the causal notion of eternal generation. Instead it is to find another way to preserve the aseity of the Son. The desire is to say that the Father gives aseity to the Son, but that seems to be obviously incoherent. Aseity just is not the sort of thing that one can give to another for the reasons outlined already.

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62   Richard Cross, "Philosophy and the Trinity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy,* ed. John Marenbon (OUP, 2012), 724–25.

63   Paasch, *divine Production*, 67 and 159.

64   Senor, "The Doctrine of the Trinity is Coherent", 343.

65   Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (OUP, 2012).

This is one reason why Calvin's doctrine was criticized in the 17ᵗʰ and 18ᵗʰ Century by Protestant and Catholic theologians. The claim was that Calvin's doctrine is either incoherent, or a poorly stated version of what Trinitarians had long affirmed.[66] However, one should not dismiss this move too quickly.

For lack of a better term, I shall refer to this approach as the Calvinist approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. The reader should not take it to imply any other aspects of Calvinism since it is only the doctrine of the Trinity that is in view. This Calvinistic move points out that we must draw a careful distinction between the divine persons and the divine essence. The Father alone exists as unbegotten, but the Calvinist says that we should not take unbegottenness to be definitive for divinity. In other words, the Calvinist wishes to say that a person can still be divine, yet lack the property *unbegotten*. How is this possible? Aseity is an essential property of divinity, so any being that shares in the divine nature exists *a se*. The Calvinist says that unbegottenness is only a property of the Father; it is a personal property that cannot be communicated to the Son or Holy Spirit. Aseity, on the other hand, is a communicable property according to the Calvinist. So the Calvinist says that the Father can communicate this essential property to the Son and Holy Spirit through the eternal act of divine production. She maintains that the Father causes the Son and Holy Spirit to exist in such a way that the Son and Holy Spirit are able to share in the divine essence. The Calvinist explains that the Father only causes the person of the Son and the person of the Holy Spirit to exist. He does not cause their essence to exist. In causing them to exist, the Father makes it the case that the Son and the Holy Spirit can share in the aseity of the divine essence.[67]

Does this Calvinistic move rebut the Eunomian objection? No. It is incoherent. No being that is caused to exist can share in aseity. The Calvinist is right to point out that we must distinguish the divine persons from the divine essence, but that does not help with this problem. In order for a person to be divine, that person must have all of the necessary and sufficient divine attributes. One of those attributes is aseity. If a person is caused to exist, that person cannot possibly have the attribute of aseity. Even if this person is eternally

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66    Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 166–78.

67    John Webster, "Life in and of Himself: Reflections on God's Aseity", in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives,* ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Rutherford House, 2008), 116.

caused to exist such that the person never came into being, that person is still not *a se* since that person is not self-existent. Further, such a person cannot have the attribute of self-sufficiency. A person cannot be self-sufficient if her essence is dependent upon something else. The Son's ability to share in the divine essence is dependent upon the Father's generative activity. So the Son is not self-sufficient.

At this point it seems that Hasker is out of possible rejoinders. The doctrine of divine processions simply does not maintain the divine equality of the persons, nor their full divinity. Instead, this Eunomian argument shows that the doctrine of divine processions entails subordinationism.

### A Brief Note on Subsistent Relations

Before moving on to consider the second Eunomian argument, I must briefly discuss the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of subsistent relations. It might be thought that the doctrine of subsistent relations will help Hasker out of this first Eunomian argument since this doctrine could possibly help explain how the divine persons are *homoousios* even though they are produced by the Father.[68] I find this suggestion doubtful for several reasons.

To start, the doctrine of subsistent relations is motivated by simplicity, and as already noted, Hasker denies divine simplicity. Without divine simplicity, I see no reason to posit subsistent relations. The doctrine of divine simplicity says that God is not a composite being in any sense. God does not have any properties, nor any potential. All of God's attributes are identical to each other, and identical to God. God is pure actuality, and as such lacks all potential. All of God's actions are identical to each other such that there is only one divine act. This one divine act is identical to God as well. On the doctrine of divine simplicity there is just the undivided divine substance that lacks any real distinctions.[69]

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68   Thank you to a reviewer for suggesting this issue to me.
69   Steven J. Duby, *divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 81–89. Duby continually affirms that distinctions of reason can be applied to God. However, this is of little help for Christian theology since distinctions of reason don't have any extramental grounding in reality. These are distinctions that exist in our mind alone. Further, several major proponents of divine simplicity explicitly deny that conceptual distinctions can apply to God. Proponents like Gregory of Nyssa, Anselm, Avicenna, and Descartes say that whatever can be divided in the mind, can be divided in reality. So they explicitly deny that even conceptual distinctions can be applied to the simple God. See my *The End of the Timeless God*, chapter 3.

When it comes to trying to figure out how to distinguish the divine persons, things become tricky to say the least. divine simplicity explicitly denies that God has any properties at all, including accidental properties.[70] So the divine persons cannot be distinguished by any properties. The idea behind the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of subsistent relations is to say that the persons are not distinguished by properties, but are distinguished by relations of origin.[71] One way to try to understand this claim is to say that the divine persons just are identical to their acts of procession. The Father just is the act of *begetting* or *paternity*, and the Son just is the act of *being begotten* or *filiation*. James Dolezal is a recent proponent of this proposal.[72] This proposal, however, runs into a serious problem since it violates (T2).

(T2) states that the divine persons are not numerically identical to each other, but this proposal entails that the persons are in fact identical to each other. The doctrine of divine simplicity explicitly states that all of God's actions are identical to each other such that there is only one divine act. Further, this one divine act is identical to the divine essence. In other words, a simple God is identical to His one act. On Dolezal's account of subsistent relations, each divine person just is identical to an act of procession. Since all of God's acts are identical to each other such that there is only one simple act, these acts of procession are identical to each other. So we no longer have any distinction between the persons. This clearly violates (T2), and so will be of little help to Hasker.

There is another reason why the Thomistic doctrine of subsistent relations will be of little help to Hasker. Hasker has also argued that the doctrine of subsistent relations violates (T2). I find his argument fairly persuasive, so I shall briefly restate it here. According to the metaphysics of proponents of divine simplicity like Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Aquinas, relations are not real items in the mind-independent world. They are items of reason alone. Given this, Hasker argues that it is incoherent to say that the divine persons are subsistent relations. Hasker argues as follows.[73]

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70   See my *The End of the Timeless God*, chapter 3.

71   Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.3–5.5.

72   James E. Dolezal, "Trinity, Simplicity and the Status of God's Personal Relations", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014), 91–93.

73   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 36–39.

(A) The only real constituent of each divine person is the divine essence.

(B) The divine persons are distinguished from each other only by the relations between them.

(C) Relations are not real items in the world but are rather mind-dependent.

(D) For any items $x$ and $y$, if $x$ and $y$ differ only in some respect that is mind-dependent, then $x$ is identical with $y$.

(A)–(C) are claims that are explicitly affirmed by Gregory, Augustine, and Aquinas. Hasker takes (D) to be a necessary truth. Given (A)–(D) we get an unwelcomed conclusion that violates (T2).

(E) The Father is identical with the Son, and each of them is identical with the Holy Spirit.

So, for these reasons, I find it doubtful that Hasker will see anything within the doctrine of subsistent relations for avoiding my first revamped Eunomian argument. With that being said, I now turn to the second Eunomian Argument.

### The Second Eunomian Argument and divine Freedom

Hasker considers another Eunomian argument, but states it in a rather weakened version. I shall present the stronger version of the argument. It is a dilemma, and goes like this. Does the Son exist by will or necessity? If the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist, the Father's actions are not free. Surely one will wish to say that the Father has free will. The pro-Nicene theologians were quite adamant that the Father freely causes the Son to exist. The eternal generation of the Son was not some involuntary overflow or emanation of the divine nature.[74] Why? During the early patristic era there seemed to be a widespread assumption that generation from the being of the Father entailed subordination, whereas the orthodox maintained that generation from the volitional will of the Father did not.[75] So saying that the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist does not seem to be a desirable option.

So the dilemma should push one to say that the Father freely causes the Son to exist. Of course, the point of the Eunomian dilemma is that the orthodox option does not seem desirable either. If the Father freely causes the

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74    Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 112.
75    See Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, chapter 2.

Son to exist, the Son will be a created contingent being because the Father could have freely done otherwise. No being that is divine has its existence contingently. To be divine is to be a necessary being. Since the Son exists contingently, the Son is not divine. This seems to be a rather difficult dilemma. How might one respond?

Hasker responds by saying that the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist, and that the Father's causal activity is free. The Father freely causes the Son to exist, but the Father could not have done otherwise.[76] Given Hasker's staunch defense of libertarian freedom over the years, it seems rather odd for him to say that the Father freely causes the Son, though the Father could not have done otherwise. Hasker does not offer much by way of explanation, so it is not clear to me how he successfully escapes the dilemma.

If Hasker is going to escape the dilemma, it seems to me that he must answer a few questions. What necessitates the Father's will to generate the Son? How does this necessity not fall victim to the first horn of the dilemma? How is the Father free in the act of generating the Son if He is unable to do otherwise? It is important to note that I am not here claiming that Hasker has no way to answer these questions. Nor am I saying that Hasker has no way out of the dilemma. Instead, I am merely saying that it is unclear how Hasker can successfully avoid the Eunomian dilemma. As I shall discuss below, Hasker does have more to say on this issue as it relates to divine love. For reasons that will soon become apparent to the reader, I still think Hasker has some explaining to do.

## The Second Eunomian Argument and divine Love

Hasker uses this Eunomian dilemma to segue into an objection directed towards the Yandellian. What the second Eunomian argument raises is the issue of divine will in the doctrine of processions. Hasker, like most orthodox in the Christian tradition, maintains that the Father freely causes the Son and Spirit to exist. This leads to a puzzling question. Why did the Father only cause two divine persons to exist? The Father is free in some sense, so it seems like He could have caused more than two divine persons to exist. It seems like He could have caused only one, or perhaps chosen to cause none. Why did the Father stop at two divine persons? Why is there a Trinity of divine persons?

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76   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 221–222.

Hasker claims that Yandellian Trinitarianism cannot explain why there are only three divine persons, whereas the doctrine of divine processions can. But Hasker's reply to the Eunomian dilemma is simply that the Father could not do other than cause the Son and the Holy Spirit to exist. Why? Why can't the Father do otherwise? Why is it necessary that the Father cause the Son and the Holy Spirit to exist? If Hasker cannot answer these questions, he has done little to advance his case against the Yandellian.

Hasker advances an argument offered by Richard of St Victor and Richard Swinburne that divine love requires a Trinity of persons in order to be perfect. Call it the 'Richard Argument.' The Richard Argument goes as follows. The Father must necessarily cause the Son and the Spirit to exist so that divine love can reach its perfection. Perfect love requires a perfect object for the love to be perfectly fulfilled. Further, the only perfect object of perfect love could be another divine person. So the Father must cause the Son to exist in order to be perfectly loving. Yet the love of two divine persons is not perfect unless they have a mutual love for a third divine person. So the Father must also cause the Spirit to exist. With three divine persons in existence, two divine persons can always show perfect mutual love for the other divine person. Why stop at three divine persons? Because no great gain seems to be had by causing another divine person to exist. So a community of three divine persons is necessary for perfect love to obtain.[77] Thus concluding the Richard argument.

Hasker notes that this argument is not a proof. Instead, he refers to it as a plausibility argument. The intent of the argument is to make it plausible why there could be three persons. However, he notes that it is hard to decisively refute the idea that a single divine person might have the universe as an adequate object of its love.[78] Unfortunately for Hasker, the Richard Argument is incredibly unpersuasive, for it does little to establish the plausibility of the claim that perfect love must consist of three divine persons.

Consider the case of a single personed God whose adequate object of love is Himself. Is there anything imperfect about this? The self-love of a perfect being is not obviously imperfect since the object of its love is perfect. Further, the self-love of a perfect being would be proportionate to the worthiness of

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77  Ibid., 220–21.
78  Ibid., 221.

the object. We often consider love to be imperfect if the love directed towards the object of the beloved is disproportionate with the worthiness of the object. (E.g. when a person loves money more than people.) In the case of divine self-love, the object of the beloved is in perfect proportion to the worthiness of the object. So it is not obvious that divine love must generate more divine persons in order to be perfect.

Nor is it persuasive that the divine love must stop at three persons. The claim from Hasker is that adding a fourth person would not be of any great gain to perfecting divine love. Surely that is not obvious. Assume that each divine person is of infinite value, and that each divine person offers perfect love. It would seem that adding another perfect being — an object of infinite value and love — would be a pretty big benefit. The benefit would be infinite. It would seem that an infinite benefit should persuade the Father, the fount of divinity, to eternally generate more than two divine persons. If the gain is infinite, it is difficult to discern why the Father should stop generating more divine persons at any point. So this plausibility argument is unpersuasive. It does not plausibly explain why perfect divine love must stop at three persons.

A proponent of Hasker's view might try to respond by saying that adding infinite value to a world that already contains infinite value does not increase the overall value of the world. The proponent of Hasker's view might conclude that there is no infinite benefit to be had, then, by adding another divine person to the world. This reply, however, will not help much since it seems to undermine any reason that the Father has for producing other divine persons. If the Father is of infinite value, then there is no gain to be had by producing any other divine person.

So where does this leave us with regard to the divine processions? The Yandellian will maintain that Hasker has offered no good reason for holding to the doctrine of the divine processions in the face of the second Eunomian objection. The Yandellian can say that one should give up the doctrine of divine processions in light of this Eunomian objection. Hasker, of course, cautions against denying the divine processions over this issue. Hasker claims that the Yandellian view is impoverished in some way by not being able to appeal to the Richard argument. Hasker's challenge to the Yandellian over the Richard Argument is as follows.

> This line of thought [the Richard Argument] cannot, however, be appropriated by a trinitarian conception that rejects the processions. The reasons given for why there is a Trinity of persons are based entirely on the surpass-

ing value of its being so. But value can only be appreciated — can only be valued — *by a person*, that is by a rational agent…But on the no-processions view, at the point at which there is a person to do the valuing, the Trinity of persons is already in place. And so it is as was stated previously: for such a view, the Trinity of persons must be seen as a brute necessity.[79]

How might a Yandellian respond to this challenge? The Yandellian is not bothered by the fact that she cannot appeal to the Richard Argument to explain why there is a Trinity of divine persons. The Yandellian finds the Richard Argument to be not only unpersuasive, but unnecessary. As noted above, the Richard Argument cannot sufficiently explain why there must be only three divine persons nor why there cannot be only one divine person, so Hasker has no advantage over the Yandellian on this issue. Further, the Yandellian thinks that the divine processions entail subordination, so it does not give us three fully divine persons at all. The Father cannot cause other fully divine persons to exist. So Hasker has no advantage over the Yandellian on this point either.

The Yandellian view, on the other hand, gives us three fully divine persons. Perhaps the Yandellian view must appeal to brute necessity as Hasker says. The Yandellian may just have to bite the bullet on this one, but the bullet does not seem to be so bad because she has at least satisfied the relevant Trinitarian desiderata. Hasker's view has not satisfied the Trinitarian desiderata. Even further, the Yandellian is quite happy to concede that at the point at which there is a person to do the valuing, the Trinity of persons is already in place. The divine persons exist necessarily. It could not be any other way. There should not be any point, logically or temporally prior, at which they are not in place. This is exactly what the Yandellian wants, so Hasker's argument fails to persuade.

### Hasker's Complaint: If Eunomius is Right, Tritheism is at Hand!

Hasker offers a challenge to anyone who thinks that the Eunomian arguments are persuasive.

> But if it is inconsistent with full deity for a divine person's existence to be dependent upon any other entity, we will have *three fully independent sources of being and godhead*, and tritheism lies close at hand."

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79   Ibid., 221.

This should not be too troubling for the Yandellian. If one truly finds the Eunomian arguments persuasive, she will think that the doctrine of processions entails the Arian version of tritheism. The Arian version of tritheism is one thing the early Church had in mind when it sought to avoid tritheism. The Arian version of tritheism is that there is one God — the Father — and two lesser divine beings — the Son and Spirit. The Yandellian can maintain that dependent divine persons just is a traditional version of tritheism that orthodox theologians sought, yet failed, to avoid.

So, it is not like our options are that great if Hasker is right. Say that Hasker's worry is correct — Yandellian trinitarianism entails tritheism. The Yandellian options seem to be this. Either accept Arian tritheism, or accept Yandellian tritheism. A Yandellian will clearly wish to accept Yandellian tritheism for the following two reasons. First, she can affirm that each divine person is fully divine. Each divine person is *a se* and self-sufficient. So far, the Yandellian is doing better than Hasker. Second, the Yandellian can affirm that each divine person is ontologically equal to the other divine persons since each is equally divine. Again, this is not something that Hasker's view can maintain since the doctrine of divine processions entails ontological subordinationism. It would seem that Hasker's challenge does little to move the Yandellian away from her position.

The Yandellian, however, is not finished. The Yandellian can go on to deny that her view entails tritheism. Hasker must do more than assert that the Yandellian Trinity entails tritheism. Hasker must show that this is the case. Recall that the Yandellian holds that the divine persons are necessarily, strongly internally related to one another such that it is impossible for the persons to exist apart from each other. Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor maintain that this type of inseparability is what distinguishes the Trinity from non-Arian versions of tritheism.[80] John Duns Scotus argues that this type of inseparability is what allows for the divine persons to be the same being without being identical to each other. It is a type of sameness without identity that is different from the material constitution accounts of the Trinity on offer today.[81] The Yandellian can affirm that this inseparabil-

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80   Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations*, 5.4. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Chapters on Love*, 2.29.

81   Cross, "Philosophy and the Trinity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, 713–722. Cf. Paasch, *divine Production*, 68–76.

ity is enough to avoid tritheism. However, the Yandellian account of divine unity also involves (T4a)–(T4d). Hasker needs to offer an argument for why (T4a)–(T4d) does not preserve divine unity, and why it entails tritheism.

Hasker gives some comments in this regard.[82] It seems that his argument primarily rests on the assumption that the divine processions is the only way to guarantee divine unity, but I have argued that it can do no such thing. Hasker complains that (T4a)–(T4d) cannot offer a deeper explanation for divine unity without the doctrine of the divine processions. Since the doctrine of the divine processions cannot give us a deeper explanation, Hasker will need to specify what this deeper explanation might look like. I'm not certain what deeper explanation would be needed other than that it is of the essence of the divine persons to exist together, and the Yandellian already has that claim. As with the argument in the previous section, Hasker is worried that the Yandellian is simply positing a brute necessity at this point. As I stated above, the Yandellian may in fact have to appeal to a brute necessity here, but it should not worry the Yandellian because she has at least satisfied the relevant Trinitarian desiderata.[83]

## The Historical and Providential Argument

Hasker offers the most peculiar defense of divine processions at the end of his chapter. He notes that no one in the early church questioned the eternal processions.

> In fact, it is reasonable to assert that the developmental process [of the doctrine of the Trinity] *could not have occurred* in anything resembling its actual shape, without that assumption.[84]

Hasker is correct in asserting that the doctrine of processions played an integral role in the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, he goes on to argue that one cannot give up this doctrine because of this historical fact.

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82   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 159–161.

83   The Yandellian can say more. In the earlier version of Yandell's paper, he goes on to use (T4a)–(T4d) to articulate an account of composition as identity for the Trinity that is similar to that offered by Scotus. This would give an even deeper account of monotheism. However, Yandell was forced to cut that material for the final published version of his paper. The material lives on in McCall, "Relational Trinity: Creedal Perspective", in Sexton, *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 131–132. As far as I know, Hasker is understandably unaware of this material from Yandell. He does not comment on it in the *Tri-Personal God*.

84   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 222.

> But if one views that history as an (otherwise) orthodox trinitarian, yet rejects the doctrine of processions, there is a rather large problem. One is then endorsing the main results of a developmental process *that had at its very heart a fundamentally wrong assumption* — the assumption that the being of Son and Spirit is derived from the Father. Somehow — by luck, or by divine providence — this distorted and misguided process managed to reach an essentially correct conclusion! But luck is surely unacceptable as an explanation here, and it would be very strange to suppose that divine providence had guided the Church through a process which essentially involved such a fundamental mistake. If we view the other results of the process as correct, and as arrived at with divine assistance, I believe it would take an extraordinarily powerful objection to justify rejecting the doctrine of processions.[85]

There are several different types of issues in here that need unpacking. First, I concede that anyone who rejects the doctrine of processions needs powerful reasons for so doing. I have offered several theological and philosophical objections here. Elsewhere, others have argued that the doctrine of processions has no biblical basis.[86] Second, I also concede that anyone who rejects the doctrine of processions must say that the doctrine of the Trinity developed through a process that essentially involves a fundamental mistake. Further, a procession denier must offer an explanation as to why a providential God would allow Christian doctrines to develop in this way. I shall not offer such an explanation here because others have done so elsewhere.[87] Instead, I shall argue that Hasker is subject to his own criticism. As such, Hasker should not hold too tightly to this line of reasoning. Hasker seems to think that this is a special problem for the Yandellian, but I shall now demonstrate that this is not a special problem since Hasker is subject to it as well.

Throughout his book, Hasker rejects divine timelessness and divine simplicity.[88] These are integral issues in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity.

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85    Ibid., 223.

86    John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 488–92.

87    Jordan Wesseling, "Christology and Conciliar Authority: On the Viability of Monthelitism for Protestant Theology", in *Christology: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Zondervan, 2013). C. Stephen Evans, "Catholic-Protestant Views on Justification" in *The Redemption,* ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (OUP, 2004). Ultimately, I fail to see the force of this providential/historical argument. If Christian theists are willing to say that God is still providentially in control during the atrocities of the 20th Century, she should not be too bothered by a few unbiblical doctrinal errors along the way.

88    This is to say nothing of his open theism which cuts deeply against the traditional view of God's providence.

It was through these divine attributes that the doctrine of the Trinity was developed. Hasker believes that these doctrines are deeply mistaken, and must be rejected.[89] He is even quite clear that we do not have to give canonical status to the favored philosophical constructions of the patristic theologians.[90] As such, I maintain that he too should believe that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity proceeded on the back of fundamental mistakes.

Simplicity plays an integral role in the development of the *homoousios* doctrine and the assertion that there is one concrete divine nature as enshrined in the Nicene Creed. It plays such an integral role in the developmental process of the doctrine of the Trinity that the historical theologian Stephen Holmes claims that one cannot have the doctrine of the Trinity without divine simplicity. divine simplicity is "the heart of Trinitarian doctrine."[91] As noted above, Kevin Giles' work highlights the role that divine timelessness plays in the development of the doctrine of divine processions. Again, one of the early Arian arguments is that all causes must have temporal effects. The Father is timeless. The Father causes the Son to exist, so the Son must be temporal. So the Son and the Father cannot be *homoousios*. The move made by Athanasius, the Council of Nicaea, and the Council of Constantinople is that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the effect is also timeless. When the Nicene Creed states that the Son was begotten before all ages, it is affirming that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the Son is also timeless. It is affirming that the Father-Son relationship is a timeless cause with a timeless effect.[92] The fifth ecumenical council (the Council of Constantinople II) affirms this teaching, and is very explicit that the Father timelessly causes the Son to timelessly exist.[93]

Hasker rejects both divine timelessness and divine simplicity. These divine attributes are the basis, the starting assumptions, for the developmental process of the doctrine of the Trinity. Since Hasker rejects these attributes, he must say that the developmental process of the doctrine of the Trinity proceeded from a fundamental mistake. Hasker has some explaining to do. He is subject to his own historical/providential criticism.

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89   Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, chapter 7.
90   Ibid., 168–70.
91   Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 200.
92   Giles, *Eternal Generation*, 108.
93   Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553*, 74.

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that Hasker has failed to defend the doctrine of divine processions. In particular, the doctrine runs afoul of *homoousios* on multiple fronts. For all of those evangelicals who reject the doctrine of divine processions, this will be good news.[94] It will give those particular evangelicals an affirmation of their position. For other theologians, however, this is not good news. Those who wish to defend the divine processions will need to offer a new defense of the doctrine.

It might be the case that another defense of the divine processions is possible. Such a defense, however, must offer substantive responses to the Eunomian objections articulated above. Theologians can no longer make appeals to the Cappadocians as if they defeated Eunomius' arguments. The Eunomian arguments can easily be rehabilitated and rearticulated. As is always the case, we Christian theologians must find new ways to defeat the arguments of the heretics, and defend the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity.[95]

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94   My intent here is not to limit this discussion only to evangelicals. I'm simply not aware of anyone outside of evangelical theology who denies the divine processions. If anyone from other Christian theological backgrounds wishes to deny the doctrine of divine processions, they are free to do so without being evangelical.

95   Thanks to James T. Turner, Kate Finley, and two anonymous reviewers for many helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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# "GOD'S ONLY BEGOTTEN SON": A REPLY TO R. T. MULLINS

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"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV). Countless Christian believers have learned these words by heart; indeed this may well be the best known, and most loved, of all the verses in the Bible. According to R. T. Mullins, however, the verse as quoted is mistaken in an important way. Mullins does not doubt that Jesus Christ is both divine and human, nor does he question the message of salvation and eternal life through Christ. His objection, rather, centers on the word "begotten", a word later taken up in the Nicene Creed in the assertion that the Son is "eternally begotten of the Father." He likewise objects to the assertion of the Creed that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father (and the Son)"; in other words he objects, as do a number of contemporary evangelical theologians, to the doctrine of "processions in God." In my recent book on the Trinity I affirmed and defended this doctrine.[1] Mullins has provided a lengthy critique of my defense,[2] and this is my reply. The reply comprises four main elements. First, there is a brief summary of the doctrine of processions. This is followed by a consideration of the three principal objections to the doctrine developed by Mullins. Next, there is a discussion of the difficulties for the doctrine of the Trinity if the doctrine of processions is rejected. Finally, I provide a positive account of the coherence and evidential support for the doctrine of processions.

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1    William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (OUP, 2013), 214–25.
2    R. T. Mullins, "Hasker on the Divine Processions of the Trinitarian Persons", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 4 (2017). Page references in the text are to this article.

## THE DOCTRINE OF PROCESSIONS

Mullins provides a fairly extensive summary of the doctrine of processions as it is found in the church fathers. He states,

> The Father alone is the first principle. The Father is "the cause and source of the Trinitarian communion."[3] Somehow the Father's volitional activity to bring about the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit is such that the Son and Holy Spirit perfectly share in the divine nature. Somehow the Father's causal activity guarantees the full divinity of the Son and Spirit, as well as the unity of the three such that there is one God and not three gods. (189).

Mullins emphasizes that the notion of begetting in play here is genuinely causal, not merely metaphorical. He adds, correctly, "On all this Hasker seems to be in agreement" (189). He goes on to quote my own summary of the doctrine of processions:

> *God the Father eternally communicates the totality of the one undivided divine nature to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and in so doing brings about the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit.*[4]

## OBJECTIONS TO THE PROCESSIONS

Mullins' strategy in his critique is to compare my trinitarian views with those of Keith Yandell, another Social trinitarian who, unlike me, rejects the doctrine of processions. He will conclude that "the Yandellian view is preferable to Hasker's view because the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity" (185). I think we can see right away, without further discussion, that Mullins is mistaken about this. The phrase 'the doctrine of the Trinity' is not a neologism whose meaning is up for grabs. The phrase has a determinate denotation, and that denotation most certainly includes the assertions about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit contained in the creed of the council of Constantinople in 381 a.d., commonly known as the Nicene Creed. Other propositions may be required as well; we need not decide about that now. But a set of statements about the Trinity that excludes part of what is said about the divine persons in that creed simply cannot pass

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3    Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (CUP, 2010), 264.
4    Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 220.

muster as "*the* doctrine of the Trinity." What we must say, then, is not that the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather that it is *included in* that doctrine. By the same token it cannot be the case that the doctrine of processions is incompatible with the creedal assertion that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father. "*homoousios*" also is not an expression whose meaning is up for grabs, to be assigned by us as we think best. The meaning of this expression is fixed precisely by its usage in the trinitarian controversies, especially in the creeds of Nicaea 325 and Constantinople 381. If we suppose that the *homoousios* doctrine is logically inconsistent with the doctrine of processions, we shall have to suppose that all of the church fathers involved in the controversy were grossly negligent in overlooking a blatant logical contradiction. Or if not that, then they were deliberately flouting the requirements of logic. If neither of these suppositions is at all plausible, as I judge they are not, we are bound to accept that the *homoousios* doctrine is fully compatible with the creedal assertions that the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father.

To be sure, it would be naïve to suppose that Mullins' criticisms can be disposed of by these considerations. The criticisms will surely return, only couched in different language. He can say, not that the doctrine of processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather that the doctrine of the Trinity, in virtue of its inclusion of the processions, is logically inconsistent and therefore false. And he will say, not that the processions contradict the *homoousios* doctrine, but rather that, in view of the doctrine of processions, the Son and the Holy Spirit may be *homoousios* with the Father but this still is not enough to guarantee that each of them is fully divine, fully God. So the answer to the criticisms provided above is a verbal one — but not "*merely* verbal", as though words were unimportant. Some words are very important indeed, and these among them.

### The Timelessness Objection

While he has acknowledged that on many points my views follow those of the Nicene fathers, there is one point in particular on which he finds my views to be in conflict with those which are presupposed by, and incorporated into, the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. This point is divine timelessness, a doctrine

which I reject (as does Mullins himself[5]), but which, he maintains, played a crucial role in the development of the doctrine of processions.[6] He asserts, "Hasker must interpret the divine processions in a way that is compatible with divine temporality. This is not something that Hasker attempts to do. In fact, Hasker seems to be unaware of this challenge; but it most certainly is a challenge" (189). Mullins is correct that I have not previously been aware of this as a problem. Now that he has called it to my attention, I am happy to address it.

If God is temporal and not timeless, how shall we understand the doctrine of processions? On the face of it, the problem does not seem a difficult one. If the Father is not timeless, he does not timelessly cause the Son to exist. Rather, what we must say is that the Father's generation of the Son is *everlasting*—that it occurs at *each and every time*, including the (perhaps unmeasured) times before the world began. Mullins, however, will not be satisfied with this answer. He cites an argument from Paul Helm:

> As Helm rightly points out, the doctrine of eternal generation rests on the possibility of timeless causes with timeless effects in order to secure the claim that the Father and Son are co-eternal. Following Richard Swinburne, Helm notes that a common claim from divine temporalists is that all causes must be temporally prior to their effects. So if the Father causes the Son to exist, the Father will be temporally prior to the Son. What this means is that there will be a time when the Son did not exist, which is one early version of Arianism! (190)

Even granting Swinburne's claim[7] that causes must be temporally prior to their effects, the conclusion does not follow. Suppose, following that assumption, that the Father's act of generation at t1 causes the Son's existence at a slightly later time t2. (But *how much* later, one might ask?) Does this mean, then, that the Son does not exist at t1? Of course not! In that case, it will be true that the Father also exists at a slightly earlier time $t_0$, and the Father's act

5    See R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (OUP, 2016).

6    I don't believe Mullins makes a convincing case that the doctrine of processions was based historically on divine timelessness. He cites Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 108, as pointing out the role that divine timelessness plays in the doctrine of the processions. But Giles, interpreting Athanasius, says "If the Father and the Son are both truly God, neither is defined by time nor constrained by it. *The Son has always been and always will be*" (emphasis added). This is the language of everlasting time, not of timelessness.

7    Actually I doubt that Swinburne would extend this claim to include divine causation. But this point about Swinburne's views is not important in the present context.

of generation at $t_0$ causes the Son's existence at $t_1$. And the act of generation at $t_1$ causes the Son's existence at $t_2$, and so on. (Naturally both the Father's generation and the Son's existence are continuous; I mention discrete times merely for ease of exposition.)

So Helm's argument fails even granting the assumption that causes must be temporally prior to their effects. But I see no good reason for granting the assumption, at least not in its full generality. The assumption may hold for physical causes and effects, because the transmission of any causal influence is limited by the speed of light (though quantum entanglement may call this into question). But where God is concerned, this limitation need not apply. If God wills at t that a certain event shall happen immediately, that event happens *at t,* not at some time shortly after t. God is everywhere; there is no "causal gap" between God and things such that a time-lag has to be allowed for so that the gap can be crossed. So Helm's argument fails, and with it the objection to processions in God based on divine temporality.

### *The Necessity vs. Choice Objection*

This however is mere prologue; Mullins' main objections to the doctrine of processions do not depend on whether God is temporal or timeless. What he does is adopt and develop a pair of objections originally stated by the fourth-century Arian theologian Eunomius. Mullins notes that in my book I do respond to these arguments; he finds my replies "a bit quick and odd" (p.10). Oddness is perhaps in the eye of the beholder, but I will agree that I may have been a little too quick. Actually, I thought it unlikely that any contemporary trinitarian would be interested in making common cause with one who was probably the most formidable opponent of the doctrine of the Trinity in the ancient church. Clearly, I was wrong about that! Here I begin with the argument Mullins presents last, since it is the one that is more easily disposed of. This argument, as stated by Mullins, is a dilemma.

> Does the Son exist by will or necessity? If the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist, the Father's actions are not free. Surely one will wish to say that the Father has free will. [...] So saying that the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist does not seem to be a desirable option. So the dilemma should push one to say that the Father freely causes the Son to exist. [...] [But] if the Father freely causes the Son to exist, the Son will be a created contingent being because the Father could have freely done otherwise. No being that is

divine has its existence contingently. To be divine is to be a necessary being. Since the Son exists contingently, the Son is not divine. (204–205)

No doubt this is an ingenious argument, but it seems to me that it was adequately answered by a counter-question posed by the Nicenes: Does God *exist* by will, or by necessity?[8] We may be hesitant to say that God exists "by necessity", as though some sort of force or power (possibly Fate?) compels God to exist. But it also seems unappealing to say that God *freely chooses* to exist (and to continue in existence) — as though an ultimate, catastrophic act of divine murder-suicide, in which God would abolish both his own existence and that of everything else, were an ever-present possibility.[9] Rather, it is *good* for God to exist; God *rejoices* in his own existence, and it is not in any way a genuine possibility that God would cease to exist. Similarly, it is *good* for the Father to generate the Son, and to spirate the Holy Spirit; neither is the Father compelled to do these things, nor is there any possibility that he would not eternally perform these actions. The problem with the Eunomian argument is that it poses a false dilemma, which in turn is made possible by a defective view of the will. I yield to no one in my appreciation for the importance of libertarian freedom, in which there are genuine, really possible alternatives for action. But it is an exaggeration to suppose that no good and valuable exercise of the will can occur in which there is not a genuinely possible alternative. Does a loving parent find himself or herself every morning with an open question as to whether they shall go on loving and caring for their child? In the *Gloria,* we "give thanks to thee for thy great glory"; does this imply that there is a genuine possibility for God not to be glorious? Once we are clear about the answers to those questions, we will be able to see what is wrong with the Eunomian argument. Mullins, however, asks "Why can't the Father do otherwise? Why is it necessary that the Father cause the Son and the Holy Spirit to exist?" (206) My answer, quite simply, is that it is *good* for the Father to do this, and that is reason enough. I think I am well entitled to dismiss Mullins' demand that I explain *why* it is good — that is, why it is better than alternatives we might imagine, such as "the idea that a

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8    Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 221–22.
9    John D. Zizioulas is one theologian who does seem to embrace this conception of divine freedom. See his *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (*St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 18, 42–46; also my *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 105–7.

single divine person might have the universe as an adequate object of its love" (206).[10] When Mullins has provided a rationally compelling reason why on his preferred no-processions view there are exactly three divine persons, I will acknowledge that he has secured an advantage for that position.[11] In the meantime, may we not leave this question in the realm of mystery?

### *The Aseity Objection*

The other argument — actually, the most important argument discussed by Mullins — is stated as follows:

> The first Eunomian argument is that to be God is to be unbegotten. The Father is unbegotten, so the Father is God. The Son is begotten, so the Son is not God. Hasker explains that the Cappadocians responded by pointing out that 'Unbegotten' only denotes a personal property of the Father, and does not denote a property of the divine essence. This was a poor response when the Cappadocians offered it, and it is a poor response now (194).

According to Mullins, there are actually two distinct attributes, aseity and self-sufficiency, that are essential for a being to be divine, but which, accord-

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10   I do suggest as a possible reason Richard of St. Victor's argument that perfect divine love requires a perfect object, which can only be another divine person, and that the mutual love of two persons is best perfected by their mutual love of a third (ibid., 220f). I put this forward as a plausibility argument, not as a demonstration, but I do think it has considerable merit. Mullins finds this "incredibly implausible", which I regret, but I don't feel myself under any particular obligation to persuade him!

11   Richard Swinburne has devised an ingenious, and possibly sound, argument for the conclusion that there must be exactly three divine persons. (See his "The Social Theory of the Trinity", *Religious Studies,* forthcoming.) We begin by accepting Richard of St. Victor's argument that there must be at least three divine persons: since it is all-things-considered best that this should be so, the Father will of necessity bring about the existence of a second and a third person. We then suppose that, since the existence of a divine person is a good thing, any world with more divine persons is so far better than any world with fewer. This sets up an infinite series of better and better worlds, each with one more divine person than the previous world. Since the series has no end, there is no world that is overall the best. In such a situation a good person will choose one of the good options available to her; her goodness is not compromised by the fact that another choice would be still better, since this is logically unavoidable. Suppose then, the Father brings about a world in which there are $n$ divine persons. Now, if $n \geq 4$, it will be the case that the demands of perfect divine goodness could have been satisfied with $n-1$ divine persons; it follows that bringing about the existence of the $n$th divine person was optional for the Father. If so, however, the existence of the $n$th divine person is contingent rather than necessary. This, however, is impossible: no being that exists only contingently can be divine. It follows that there must be exactly three divine persons.

ing to the doctrine of processions, the Son and the Holy Spirit are lacking. He defines these attributes as follows:

> *Aseity*: A being exists a se if and only if its existence is not dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself.

> *Self-sufficiency*: A being is self-sufficient if and only if its essential nature is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself (197).

Mullins remarks, "Aseity and self-sufficiency capture the Creator/creature distinction and provide a natural way for explicating divine ultimacy" (196). Mullins acknowledges that these attributes are necessarily co-extensive, but he believes clarity is increased if we maintain the distinction between them. And the implication is clear: Given the doctrine of processions, the Son and the Holy Spirit possess neither aseity nor self-sufficiency, and so they cannot be divine. The only way to avoid this is to deny the processions, which will allow Son and Spirit to possess aseity and self-sufficiency and so to be fully divine. This is a serious argument, and it may well inform a good deal of the current uneasiness about, even rejection of, the doctrine of processions. Thus, William Craig states that the doctrine of processions "introduces a subordinationism into the Godhead which anyone who affirms the full deity of Christ ought to find very troubling."[12]

I begin my response to this argument by reminding us that claims about essential divine attributes need to be scrutinized with great care. There are a number of attributes that have been claimed to be essential to deity, which nevertheless some philosophers and theologians decisively reject. Two such attributes already noted are divine timeless eternity, and the strong doctrine of divine simplicity — both rejected by Mullins himself. It is often claimed that the doctrine of God as creator of all things means that God must unilaterally determine each and every event that occurs — a view which, of course, leaves no room for libertarian free will for the creatures. The strong doctrine of divine impassibility affirms that God can never be affected in any way by creatures, which implies that the knowledge God has of creatures must be derived entirely from resources internal to God's own being, not from the creatures themselves. And so on. In pointing this out, I do not imply the Mul-

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12   J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 594. (While the book is co-authored, it is Craig who is responsible for the material on the Trinity.)

lins' (and Eunomius') claims about essential divine attributes can be lightly dismissed; they require our most careful scrutiny. But claims of this sort are not to be simply taken at face value, whatever the source.

With that as introduction, I now propose three possible candidates for essential divine attributes. These attributes are all aspects of *independence* (or non-dependence) for the divine; they express the idea that God must not be dependent on anything outside of God. These attributes, however, are concerned only with the independence of God's *being or existence;* they do not concern themselves with other sorts of independence, such as independence of any causal influence from creatures. Having set out the attributes, we shall then proceed to evaluate them from the standpoint of different theological positions.

(I)   A being Θ is *logically independent* of other beings, if it is not logically necessary that, if Θ exists, some other being does as well.

At first glance, logical independence seems to be a fundamental requirement for any being that has any claim to independent existence. Still, there are complications here that we shall need to consider further.

(II) A being Θ is *causally independent* of other beings, if there is no causal law or principle which requires that, if Θ exists, other beings also exist.

This also seems reasonably clear: If a being, in order to exist, somehow needs other beings to exist along with it, that being is not in the fullest sense independent.

(III) A being Θ is *independent of causal input* from other beings if there is no requirement that, in order for Θ to exist, some other being must provide causal input for Θ.

The point being made can be clarified by pointing out that (III) excludes only the *active causality* of another being as required for the existence of Θ, whereas (II) does not have this restriction to active causality. So (II) implies (III), but (III) does not imply (II).

Having set out these different kinds of independence for a putative divine being, we proceed to evaluate them from the standpoint of three different theological positions. The first is that of Eunomius, the fourth-century Arian. The second is that of Nicene trinitarianism, a view that includes the doctrine of processions. And finally, there is the stance of the Yandellian, whose trinitarian theology is generally orthodox except for its rejection of the proces-

sions. In each case we shall ask: for this theological position, what are the requirements for being God? And, what are the requirements for being a divine person? The difference between these two question hinges on the fact that, for a Social trinitarian, each of the persons is *wholly God,* but each person is not *the whole of God.*

For Eunomius, of course, that distinction makes no difference; there is one and only one divine person, namely the Father. Eunomius will happily embrace each of (I), (II), and (III) as requirements for being God, and for being a divine person — requirements that are met by the Father and by no one else; in particular, not by the Son or the Holy Spirit.

For the Nicene Trinitarian, things are considerably different. For the Nicene, all of (I), (II), and (III) are requirements for, and are met by, the Trinity as a whole. On the other hand, none of them is a requirement for a divine person as such. It will be noted, of course, that (III) is in fact met by the Father, and not by the Son or the Holy Spirit. This, however, is a personal attribute of the Father, deriving from his distinct role in the Trinity; it is not a part of the common divine essence, which is shared by all three persons. As we have seen, Mullins thinks this is a "poor response"; whether this is so is something we now have to consider.

But finally, what of the Yandellian? For the Yandellian as for the Nicene, all of (I), (II), and (III) are satisfied by the Trinity as a whole. One might think the Yandellian would want to say that each is satisfied also by each of the persons individually. But this creates a problem: If this is so, in what does the unity of the Trinity consist? Why don't we have, in this case, simply three different divine beings, each complete in itself? Yandell himself, as we shall see, holds that the divine persons individually *do not* satisfy (I). At this point, though, we may begin to suspect a degree of arbitrariness: Why is any sort of *causal* dependence between divine Persons unacceptable, and yet *logical* dependence of each on the others is unproblematic? Indeed, it now becomes questionable whether the divine persons can possess either aseity or self-sufficiency, since each is logically dependent on the other two, which seems to be incompatible with those attributes as Mullins has defined them.

In addition, a problem arises concerning the Yandellian's evaluation of the Nicene position. Why, we may ask, is the violation of (III) in the Nicene view a bar to considering the Son fully divine, whereas the Father's violation of (II) is unproblematic? The Father is unable to exist without the Son and the Spirit

being caused to exist by him; is this not a genuine form of causal dependence? Apparently the thought is that the dependence of a being on the *active* causality of another is a "serious" sort of dependence, whereas the need for the *passive or receptive* causality of another is not. But while this may have some appeal, its cogency is open to question. We humans depend on the active causality of air pressure to force oxygen into our lungs when we inhale, but we are no less dependent on the passive causality by which the environment permits us to exhale; preventing us from exhaling will kill us in short order. Other such examples could easily be found. Furthermore, it is sometimes urged as an objection to certain pantheistic and panentheistic schemes that, on those schemes, God could not refrain from producing a world. A God who is "bound to create", it is sometimes felt, does not have the full independence that is suitable for the being than which nothing greater can be conceived. But if the Father, in virtue of the failure to satisfy (II), is less than fully independent, this undermines the claim of inequality between the persons, the claim that fuels the accusation that the Nicene view is implicitly Arian.

I don't claim that these considerations provide a knock-down refutation of Yandellianism, or for that matter of Arianism. I think they do show that the notion of independence, as applied to Trinitarian persons, is not simple or self-evident — but if that is so, the cogency of the objections to Nicene Trinitarianism becomes questionable. It begins to look as though the decision to affirm (III) as the trip-wire for a denial of the full deity of the Son is a somewhat arbitrary choice, one we need not feel compelled to endorse.

## COSTS OF REJECTING THE PROCESSIONS

To this point we have been concerned with the objections to the doctrine of processions posed by Mullins; now we need to consider some of the costs that are incurred if that doctrine is rejected. These costs are of two kinds: theological difficulties, and a difficulty in understanding the development of Christian doctrine.

### *The Divine Unity Problem*

The theological challenge for the Yandellian is to provide an adequate account of divine unity, without appealing to the doctrine of processions. As Mullins notes, Yandell has stated his view on the divine unity in four propositions:

(T1)    For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P exist
        and either of the other Trinitarian persons not exist.

(T2)    For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P will what is
        not willed by the other Trinitarian persons.

(T3)    For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P engage in
        any activity in which the other Trinitarian persons in no way engage.

(T4)    The persons of the Trinity have complete non-inferential awareness of
        one another.[13]

Concerning these propositions, Yandell states that their conjunction "defines oneness of the three."[14] I have argued that these propositions do not suffice to rule out a situation in which *each of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is an ultimate, independent source of being*, a view which I take to be tritheistic. I did not say or imply that Yandell actually holds the view in question, but a theory of divine unity that is unable to rule out such a view cannot possibly be an adequate statement of the unity of God.

But why do I say that (T1)–(T4) is so weak? (Probably, much weaker than Yandell intended.) The initial problem is that, *if each of Father, Son, and Spirit is a necessary being* (a view to which Yandell is committed),[15] then (T1) falls out immediately, *without* our having to assume any real dependence relationship between the three persons. (If the Holy Spirit is a necessary being, then it is impossible for you, or for me, to exist without the Holy Spirit's existing, but that tells us nothing, so far, about any meaningful dependence relation between the Holy Spirit and us.) But given (T1), (T4) comes at no additional cost, assuming as we must that each of the persons is cognitively perfect. And given this much, (T2) and (T3) are also unproblematic. As for (T2), the three persons are all morally perfect, and will never make mistakes in considering the value of worldly states of affairs. Even so, we might imagine, there could be situations in which, say, the Son and the Holy Spirit

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13   Keith Yandell, "How Many Times Does Three Go Into One?", in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. Michael C. Rea and Thomas H. McCall (OUP, 2009), 167; cited by Mullins (with altered numbering of the propositions) on p. 185.

14   Yandell, ibid.

15   Keith Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting? Trinity and Consistency", *Religious Studies* 30, no. 2 (1994): 204.

initially prefer two different and incompatible courses of divine action. If this happens, however, they will surely recognize a moral imperative to reach agreement, and will succeed in doing so. (Even we fallible and imperfect human beings often manage this sort of thing.) Finally, given (T2), the persons will undoubtedly co-operate with each other in whatever way is best, as (T3) states. So (T1)–(T4) are all easily within reach — but nothing in these propositions rules out the situation in which each of the three is an ultimate, independent source of being. Contrary to Yandell, we can now say that "(T1)–(T4) *can not* define oneness of the three."[16]

More recently, Yandell proposes as a solution "the doctrine that the Father depends for existence on the Son and Holy Spirit, the Son depends for existence on the Father and Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit depends for existence on the Father and the Son."[17] In this way he replaces the one-sided derivation of Son and Spirit from the Father, postulated by the doctrine of processions, with a mutual dependence. But what sort of dependence is this? It cannot be causal dependence, according to Yandell, because the essential divine attribute of aseity is the property, *existing without being caused by anything else.* If the Persons are caused to exist by each other, then none of them exists *a se*, as Yandell insists that they must. The dependence, then, must be logical rather than causal. But it is difficult to see how this can work. If the Son's existence logically presupposes the Father's existence, then the Father's existence must be logically prior to that of the Son. But then, since the dependence relation goes both ways, it follows that the Father's existence logically presupposes the Son's existence, and so it seems that it must be the Son's existence that is logically prior — but obviously, both cannot be true. Perhaps, then, what is necessary is the entire complex of Father plus Son plus Holy Spirit. That is to say:

(N1)   Necessarily, (Father + Son + Holy Spirit) exists.

This situation, however, is logically indistinguishable from the following:

(N2)   Necessarily, the Father exists, *and,*

(N3)   Necessarily, the Son exists, *and,*

(N4)   Necessarily, the Holy Spirit exists.[18]

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16   For an expanded version of this argument, see Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 158–61.

17   Keith Yandell, review of my *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, available at *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews,* http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/48755-metaphysics-and-the-tri-personal-god/

18   Yandell affirms (N2)–(N4) in "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error", 204.

Indeed, (N1)–(N4) seems to be precisely what Yandell has in mind; in a more recent article, he leans heavily on the claim that the Trinity is a "logically inseparable triad" as guaranteeing the divine unity.[19] Contrary to what Yandell seems to think, however, (N1)–(N4) *completely fails* to secure any meaningful dependence relationship between the three divine Persons. Nothing whatever can exist if a necessary being fails to exist: If the number 37 is a necessary being, then it is impossible that you or I should exist and that number fail to exist — but this, of course, says nothing whatever about any meaningful dependence relation between each of us and that number. Indeed, the number 37, the mean distance between the earth and Mars, and the smell of avocado form a logically inseparable triad! (Even if there were no planets or avocados, the properties in question arguably are necessary existing abstract objects.) Similarly, (N1)–(N4) are consistent with the proposition that each of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is an ultimate source of being; each possesses a necessity that is in no way derived from any other being, and whatever further relationships may exist between them are subsequent to the existence of each person. If this is not tritheism, it comes far too close to that for comfort. But if with Yandell we deny the processions, it is hard to see how this conclusion can be avoided.

In the light of these considerations, I think we must conclude that Yandell has not yet shown how he can give an adequate account of the divine unity consistent with his denial of the processions. Furthermore, the Yandellian view has very little claim to biblical support — something that (as I will argue) is not true of the Nicene view.

## *The History of Doctrine Problem*

The other area of significant difficulty for the no-processions view concerns the history of Christian doctrine. Now, it is beyond question that the idea of processions — more generally, the notion that the Son and the Holy Spirit are somehow ontologically derived from the Father — played an absolutely central role in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, from the second century on. The question is, what should be made of this fact? For an orthodox trinitarian, who affirms the doctrine of processions, there is no problem. Such a trinitarian, mindful of the promise that the Spirit will guide

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19    Keith E. Yandell, "The Doctrine of the Trinity: Consistent and Coherent", in *Building on the Founda-tions of Evangelical Theology: Essays in Honor of John S. Feinberg*, ed. Gregg R. Allison and Stephen J. Wellum (Crossway, 2015), 162.

the disciples into the truth (John 16:13), will suppose that the doctrine of the Trinity is an example of this guidance, through which, in spite of many twists and turns, the church arrived at conclusions that are fundamentally sound. On the other hand, the historical development poses no special problem for the trinitarian skeptic, who can write the whole process off as simply another example of metaphysical wrangling in the ancient world. There is a problem, I submit, for the Yandellian trinitarian, one who holds the doctrine of the Trinity to be true for the most part but rejects the doctrine of processions. Is there not something deeply incongruous in the notion that God would lead his church to the truth through a process that was based throughout on a fundamental assumption that was false? Could God not have led his followers to the truth without the inclusion of this massive and damaging error? Or if, due to historical circumstances, the erroneous assumption had to be tolerated for a time, could it not have been outgrown and left to one side, as were various other false starts? In this connection Mullins writes, "I fail to see the force of this providential/ historical argument. If Christian theists are willing to say that God is still providentially in control during the atrocities of the 20th Century, they should not be too bothered by a few unbiblical doctrinal errors along the way" (211, note 87). This misses the point. The issue is not the intrinsic evil of doctrinal error, but the incongruity of attributing the sort of process described specifically to the guidance of the Spirit in leading the church to the truth. This is amplified when Mullins, after pressing the Eunomian argument from aseity and self-sufficiency, surveys several later theologians whose views might provide an escape from that argument. (The list includes Aquinas, Scotus, and Calvin; needless to say, each of their suggestions is found to be unsatisfactory.) For me, the interest of this lies not in the possibility of using their ideas as escape from the Eunomian argument, an escape which I don't think is needed. The interest lies, rather, in the fact that it shows how truly devastating Mullins' position is for our understanding of the history of Christian belief. Remember that the difficulty with the doctrine of processions, according to Mullins, is that it is implicitly Arian; it implies a denial of the full deity of Jesus Christ. We must conclude, then, that all of these "great lights" in the history of Christian doctrine were threatened in this way: Arius may have been shown out the front door, but he has snuck back in through the window left open by the doctrine of processions! And what is true of these theological greats will of course also be true of innumerable

lesser figures, all of whom retained the processions and thus had a potentially fatal error in the heart of their theology. All is not lost, however! In the 20th and early 21st centuries there has arisen a small but valiant band of theologians and philosophers who, at long last, have set things straight and established the doctrine of the Trinity on a solid basis! If the reader of this essay finds this to be a plausible and attractive account of the history of doctrine, she is welcome to embrace it. To me, it seems grotesque.

Mullins responds to this with a *tu quoque.* He argues that "Hasker is subject to his own criticism. As such, Hasker should not hold too tightly to this line of reasoning" (211). In particular, he cites the doctrine of divine simplicity, which I reject (as does Mullins himself), and so he concludes "I maintain that he too should believe that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity proceeded on the back of fundamental mistakes" (212). Mullins has a point here. Anyone dealing with ancient doctrines faces a double challenge: on the one hand, to maintain and defend the truth achieved by the ancient theologians; on the other hand, to state that truth in terms that make it intelligible and, so far as possible, credible in terms of the thought-world of today. Anyone attempting this is open to challenges from both directions: either that too much of the tradition has been lost, or that too much that is obsolete has been retained.

Having said this, I believe there is a qualitative difference between what I have done with divine simplicity, and what Mullins has done with the processions. Simplicity played a role in the development of Trinitarian doctrine, but it is replaceable, and I have suggested how this might be done.[20] Mullins has not shown, and I suspect *could not* show, how the processions could be replaced. In terms of a musical example, my procedure is as if one took an orchestral score and replaced the bassoon part with a tenor saxophone; he, in contrast, is dispensing with the entire string section. Once that has been done, it is difficult to know whether we are still listening to the same composition.

## THE CASE FOR THE PROCESSIONS

Finally, we turn to the affirmative case that can be made for the doctrine of processions in God. Over and above the difficulties that result from denying the processions, what positive reasons can we give for affirming the doctrine?

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20    See Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 226–45.

Part of that case has already been made in the previous section, in discussing the role of the processions in the development of trinitarian doctrine. At this point a few brief remarks will be made about additional theological merits of the doctrine of processions. Then we will turn to a topic that until now has gone undiscussed: the biblical basis for the doctrine.

## Theological Benefits of the Processions

Theologically we may well begin with an idea that Mullins finds incredible: that the processions are precisely what grounds the equality of the divine persons. According to Christopher A. Beeley, "Gregory [Nazianzen] is firmly rejecting the notion that the monarchy of the Father in any way conflicts with the equality of the three persons — on the grounds that it is precisely what brings about that equality."[21] The underlying idea here is one that applies in cases of natural reproduction: Parent organisms pass on to their offspring the entirety of their species-nature. What results from the union of two horses, or frogs, or human beings is, in each case, a horse, a frog, or a human being. The causal priority of the parents in no way implies that they are truer representatives of that common nature than are the offspring. (If this were not the case, life on earth would be in a state of precipitous decline, with each generation inferior to the preceding one.) By the same token, what is passed on in the divine processions is the totality of the divine nature; that is exactly what is meant by *homoousios.* (As noted above, it is historically untenable to claim that *homoousios* means something that is incompatible with the processions.) To be sure, in the normal course of human life a parent is herself the child of her own parents, and her children may in turn become parents. But the very first humans, if there were such, and the very last, if such there will be, are neither less nor more human than all those in between. In a closed group such as the Trinity there must of necessity be a first and a last, but this in no way implies that one is "more divine" than the other. The Father has a special role, as the beginning of the entire process, but then so does the Spirit have a special role as the consummation of the process. Especially if we take the Western view that the Son is involved in the procession of the Holy Spirit, there is a pleasing symmetry: The Father gives life and being but does not, in

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21   Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God,* (OUP, 2008), 209–210.

the first instance, receive it (though he receives much by way of the trinitarian perichoresis). The Spirit receives, but does not give — and the Son both receives from the Father, and gives to the Spirit. None can exist without the other two; the maximal degree of independence belongs, not to the persons individually, but to the Trinity as a whole. In the words of the Athanasian Creed, "in this Trinity there is no before or after, no greater or lesser, but all three persons are equally eternal with each other and fully equal."

<div align="center">*The Biblical Case for the Processions*</div>

We have briefly expounded the doctrine of processions, and have considered Mullins' main objections to the doctrine. We have also noted the problems created for the Yandellian by denying the processions, both in adequately affirming the unity of God, and in giving a plausible reading of the history of Trinitarian doctrine. And we have reviewed certain theological advantages that flow from the doctrine of processions. Finally, we turn to the topic of biblical support for the doctrine of processions — a topic Mullins does not address at all, in a critique that is twice as long as the chapter he is criticizing! To be sure, one might suppose that little needs to be said because there is little support to be considered. I will show, however, that this is not the case. It is indeed true that one cannot find the doctrine of processions explicitly stated in Scripture. Neither, of course, can we find the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly stated. Any realistic view must accept that this doctrine, together with the doctrine of the incarnation, represents the culmination of centuries of intensive reflection on the biblical data, and not simply a transcribing of that data. But if we ask whether there is anything in Scripture that points to an ontological dependence of the Son on the Father, the answer must be, "Yes, quite a bit."[22]

The belief that the doctrine of processions lacks biblical warrant has drawn much of its inspiration from a 1953 article by Dale Moody, who argued on linguistic grounds that *monogenēs,* traditionally translated as "only begotten" (as in John 3:16), is linguistically related to *genos* ("class or kind") rather than to *gennaō* ("beget"), and thus is correctly translated simply as "only or unique."[23] This seems to be correct on linguistic grounds, though one might wonder

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22   I discussed the matter of biblical support in *Tri-Personal God,* 217–17; what is said here adds only a little to that discussion. Giles devotes an entire chapter to the topic; see his *The Eternal Generation of the Son,* 63–90.

23   For a full discussion see ibid., 63–66.

whether ancient writers were always so meticulous in avoiding the association of *monogenēs* with *genna*ō. (We shall return to this point later.) However, the biblical warrant for the doctrine of processions is by no means limited to this one word. The fundamental starting point for the notion of eternal generation is the language of "Father" and "Son", which is pervasive in the New Testament. If the eternal generation of the Son is denied, the Father-Son relationship must be viewed as having its inception with the incarnation. This however is implausible as a reading of some biblical texts; for instance, John 17, where Jesus, self-identified as the Son, refers to "the glory that I had in your presence before the world was made." Consider also Hebrews 1:2, which speaks of "a Son [...] through whom also he created the worlds." Especially pertinent here is John 5:26, a text heavily emphasized by Augustine: "For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." To *have life in oneself* is most certainly a divine attribute; it is inconceivable that this could be said of a mere creature. And this divine attribute is said to have been "granted" to the Son by the Father. While this text does not directly express the doctrine of eternal generation, it surely points strongly in that direction.[24]

Alongside the Father-Son texts, there are other passages that strongly imply a relation of ontological dependence between Father and Son. The notion of Word, or Reason (however *logos* is best understood) clearly implies such dependence. "Word" and "Reason" are not free-standing entities; a *logos* is the Word or Reason *of someone*. The text from Hebrews cited above continues by saying that the Son is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (NIV); both "radiance" and "representation" imply a relation of dependence.[25] In Colossians 1:15 Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." I would not wish to claim that these passages, together with others cited by Giles, constitute a proof of the doctrine of the processions. They do, I believe, provide significant support, and should give us pause if we are inclined to see the church fathers as systematically mistaken on this important point.

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24   For an excellent discussion of this passage, with extensive reference to Augustine, see Keith Johnson, "Augustine, Eternal Generation, and Evangelical Trinitarianism", *Trinity Journal* 32, no. 2 (2011): 147–53.

25   RSV and NRSV have "reflects" or "reflection" rather than "radiance", thus understanding *apaugasma* in a passive rather than an active sense. But a reflection also has a decidedly derivative character.

I mentioned above that it is not certain that *monogenēs* never implies a relationship of begetting between Father and Son. One text that challenges this interpretation is John 1:18, where the best-attested reading is *monogenēs theos*, though some prefer instead the easier reading *monogenēs huios* (Son). If *theos* is accepted, this puts pressure on the interpretation of *monogenēs*. The adjective *monogenēs* must then distinguish *theos* who is the revealer from the unseen *theos* in the first part of the verse—and neither "only" nor "unique" serves that purpose well. F. F. Bruce, who accepts the reading *theos*, translates *monogenēs theos* as "the only-begotten, (himself) God."[26] That is literal and explicit, but the NRSV translators took a different approach. They wished to avoid the now-archaic "begotten", but nevertheless retain the father-son relationship which they found to be expressed in *monogenēs.* Their lovely solution to the problem provides a fitting conclusion for this essay: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

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26　F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 44.

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# ABDUCTIVE REASONING AND AN OMNIPOTENT GOD: A RESPONSE TO DANIEL CAME

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Daniel Came[1] boldly argues that given certain assumptions, no omnipotent being can even in principle be the best explanation for some contingent state of affairs *S*.[2] In this paper, I argue that (i) even given Came's assumptions, his argument rests crucially on a non sequitur, that (ii) he just assumes that the prior probability of God's existence is very low, and that (iii) his conclusions entail propositions that are very probably false.

## §1. CAME'S ASSUMPTIONS

Came assumes the following (19–20):

**A1:** We should allow into our ontology only what figures in the best explanation of an event or fact.

**A2:** Explanation is contrastive by nature, in that the explanandum always consists in a contrast between a fact and a foil.

**A3:** To be God, a being must be omnipotent.

**A4:** For any proposition *p*, an omnipotent being has the power to make *p* true.

**A5:** Citing a cause is always explanatory.

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1    Daniel Came, "Theism and Contrastive Explanation." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 1 (2017): 19–26. doi:10.24204/ejpr.v9i1.1862.
2    Came speaks of God's making propositions true. In this paper, I prefer to speak of God's actualizing states of affairs; but this makes no difference to the argument's evaluation. Furthermore, I assume, along with Came, that the relevant states of affairs that God is said to bring about are contingent. I also assume that the relevant states of affairs are strongly actualizable (to use Plantingan terminology).

According to Came, to say that a state of affairs $S1$ explains a state of affairs $S2$ is to say that $S1$ explains why $S2$ obtains rather than why its complement $S2*$ obtains. But since Came argues that an omnipotent God can never explain why some $S$ obtains rather than $S*$, God cannot be the best explanation for $S$. So, by A1, we should not allow God into our ontology.

## §2. CAME'S NON SEQUITUR

Now, the crucial step in Came's argument is moving from A2–A5 to the bold conclusion that an omnipotent God cannot — even in principle — be the best explanation for some state of affairs $S$. But how does he make this move? Came explains this move in the following excerpt (23):

> [God's] infinite power implies that differences in the effort required on God's part to bring about different states of affairs are negligible. It follows that for any true contingent proposition $p$, "God caused $\sim p$" (Or "God caused it to be the case that $\sim p$"). That is, for any true contingent proposition $p$, citing God is just as good a causal explanation of $p$ as of $\sim p$.

However, this is just a non sequitur. From

(1) A state of affairs $S$ and its complement $S*$ are just as "easy" for God to actualize,

it does not follow that

(2) The probability of $S$'s obtaining given God's existence is equal to the probability of $S*$'s obtaining given God's existence.

God may have reasons to prefer actualizing $S$ over $S*$ (or vice versa). Came is certainly aware of this "most obvious objection", (24) and since the success of his reply is crucial to the success of his argument, I quote him at length (24–25):

> If one grants A1–A4, then the most obvious objection to the argument is that God may have *reasons* to cause $p$ rather than $\sim p$ and he brings about $p$ and so some statements of the form "God explains $p$ rather than $\sim p$" can be true after all. That is, although God *could* cause anything, it does not follow that He would. God may have good reasons for preferring the obtaining of $p$ over the obtaining of $\sim p$, and act on those reasons. Another way of putting the point is this: If we are asked "Why $p$ rather than $\sim p$?", it seems perfectly proper to answer: "Because God had preferred $p$ to $\sim p$ and consequently chose to bring about $p$." However, in the proposed explanations, the appeal

to God does no explanatory work. Instead, the appeal to the *reasons* attributed to God (and his choosing to act on them) does the explanatory work and that appeal just presupposes God's existence and so gives us no reason to introduce God into our ontology. In reply, it might be said that the reasons God has for preferring *p* to ~*p* do not all by themselves cause *p* to be true rather than ~*p*. So God's existence is surely an essential component of the causal explanation of why *p* is true rather than ~*p*. The reasons God has for bringing about *p* rather than ~*p* do not do any explanatory work on their own; they help explain something *p* only insofar as God *has* these reasons and brings about *p for* those reasons. God's existence is an essential constituent in this explanation. Insofar as *God's acting for reason R* is the result of an inference to the best explanation, this appeal does not seem so much to *presuppose* God's existence as to provide grounds for *positing* God's existence. However, we must distinguish between the "what" component of a causal explanation and the "why" component. In the explanation in question, God is the answer to the question "What caused *p*?", while the reasons attributed to God (and his choosing to act on them) are the answer to the question "Why did God cause *p* rather than ~*p*?" So, since explanations are answers to why questions, it is the reasons (and God's acting on them) that do all the explanatory work. That is, what explains the fact that *p* rather than ~*p* is the fact that God has the reasons He does (and chooses to act on them). But that explanation already presupposes that there *is* a God. What we are still missing is an explanatory context in which God might be introduced into our ontology in the first place. If we are asked "Why *p* rather than ~*p*?", it is no more acceptable to answer: "Because God preferred *p* to ~*p* and consequently chose to bring about *p*" than it would be to identify Jane's husband as her murderer on the grounds that Jane's husband preferred Jane dead rather than alive and consequently chose to murder Jane *unless we already have an explanatory context in which Jane's husband is included in our ontology in the first place*. "Because Jane's husband preferred Jane dead and consequently chose to murder her" has no explanatory power in respect of Jane's death unless it is already justifiably believed that Jane has a husband.

Came adequately represents "the most obvious objection" to his argument. But his response seems to be confused. In the theist-atheist dialectic, the theist, in attempting to explain some *S* (e.g., the existence of many non-divine persons), is not *presupposing* God's existence by appealing to His reasons for preferring *S* over *S*\*. Rather, the theist is *inferring* the existence of a God with such and such a nature or reasons from the fact of *S*'s obtaining. The theist claims that *S*'s obtaining is a *reason* for postulating the existence of a God with such and such a nature or reasons. No questions are begged on the part of the theist.

Moreover, Came's bifurcation of causal explanations into "what" and "why" components, as if one is always independent of the other, is similarly confused. The existence of a God with such and such a nature or reasons is both an answer to what (ultimately) caused *S* and why *S* obtained. So Came has given us no good reason to believe that the inference from (1) to (2) is not simply a non sequitur.

## §3. EXPLANATORY CONTEXT AND PRIOR PROBABILITY: A FURTHER OBJECTION

On a related note, Came seems to crucially assume that the prior probability of God's existence is very low. After all, he seems to endorse the following principle in his discussion of the example from Jane's murder:

(3) We are not justified in appealing to the reasons of a putative agent *A* in explaining a (contingent) state of affairs *S* unless we already have an explanatory context in which *A* is included in our ontology in the first place.

So Came ostensibly believes that because we have no explanatory context for postulating God's existence in the first place, we are not justified in appealing to the reasons of God in explaining some *S*. But the clause "unless we have an explanatory context in which *A* is included in our ontology in the first place" just sounds like a roundabout way of saying, "unless the prior probability of *A*'s existence is sufficiently high", where "sufficiently high" means high enough to meet some threshold *k* that is not very low.[3] But then (3) just seems to be equivalent to the following:

(3') We are not justified in appealing to the reasons of a putative agent *A* in explaining a (contingent) state of affairs *S* unless the prior probability of *A*'s existence is $\geq k$.

Although (3') seems to be obviously true, it alone plays no significant role in Came's argument. Came needs to show that the prior probability of God's existence is not $\geq k$ for (3') to even be relevant to his argument. But to do this Came will have to argue for why the prior probability of God's existence

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3    A prior probability of $10^{-20}$ would not be sufficiently high to meet the *k*-threshold. But it seems that a probability of $10^{-3}$ would be $\geq k$.

doesn't meet the $k$-threshold, and not simply assume it, as he has done in his article. Given Came's remarks, discussion of the prior probability of God's existence, and not a relatively trivial principle like (3'), should be at or near the center of his argument.

## §4. CAME'S OVERLY BOLD CONCLUSIONS

Lastly, it's worth noting that Came's argument is overly bold, and its conclusions entail propositions that are very probably false.

If Came is correct, then not only is the probability that $S$ obtains given that God exists equal to the probability that $S^*$ obtains given that God exists, but *any* contingent $S$ that God can actualize will be just as probable as any other $S$ given God's existence! This is because God — *qua* omnipotent — can just as easily actualize any $S$ (that is strongly actualizable). But surely this is false. The probability that the traditional God actualizes a world at which just rocks and non-minded animals exist is clearly not equal to the probability that He actualizes a world at which there are non-divine persons. Given his omnibenevolent nature, the probability that God would actualize the latter world is *enormously more probable* than that he would actualize the former.[4] Or, if one finds the above counterexample unconvincing, consider the following. The probability that God actualizes a world with $n$ amount of free non-divine persons at which only a few people ultimately end up being unhappy is clearly not equal to, and is indeed much greater than, the probability that God actualizes a world with $n$ amount of free non-divine persons, the vast majority of whom ultimately end up being terribly unhappy.

Furthermore, if Came is correct, then no one could — even in principle — arrive at God's existence through valid abductive reasoning. Suppose that doubting Thomas really did put his fingers in the side of the risen Jesus of Nazareth. On Came's view, Thomas would not and could not have been justified if he claimed that "there is an omnipotent God who raised Jesus from the dead" was the best explanation for his experiences! Moreover, suppose that I witnessed a vision where an angel told me that an omnipotent God created the universe, disclosed to me some future event that later took place exactly as foretold, and my cognitive faculties were functioning properly during the

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4    See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*. 2nd ed., OUP, 2004, 123 for more details.

vision. On Came's view, I wouldn't be justified in believing that the best explanation for the universe is the existence of an omnipotent God! But surely any argument that implies this is flawed.

So either Came's assumptions (A1–A5) or his reasoning here has to be flawed. I claim that it's at least the latter (whether his assumptions are correct is not the subject of this paper).

In conclusion, Came's argument, which he boldly claims "neutralizes all a posteriori theistic arguments from the get-go", (26) simply (i) makes use of a non sequitur, (ii) assumes that the prior probability of God's existence is very low, and (iii) has conclusions that entail propositions that are very probably false. An a priori silver bullet against all a posteriori theistic arguments remains elusive.