

Basics of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

Handout for Lecture #3

Bad Versions

Version 1

1. God knows infallibly that tomorrow I will eat a bagel for breakfast.
2. If God infallibly knows that tomorrow I will eat a bagel for breakfast, then my eating a bagel tomorrow is incapable of not occurring.
3. Therefore, my eating a bagel tomorrow is not free.

Problem: The conclusion does not follow from the premises! The right conclusion is: “my eating a bagel is incapable of not occurring.” This conclusion entails nothing specifically about free will since God could infallibly know that I will *freely* eat a bagel tomorrow, wherein the conclusion would be that “my *freely* eating a bagel is incapable of not occurring.”

Version 2.1

1. Necessarily, if God foreknows x , then x will occur.
2. God foreknows x .
3. Therefore, x will necessarily occur.

Problem: This is a fallacious inference as well. The conclusion should be: “ x will happen.” To infer necessity from (1.) is incorrect. Consider the following counterexample:

1. Necessarily if Michael Jordan’s jersey number is 23, then Jordan’s jersey is a prime number.
2. Michael Jordan’s jersey number is 23.
3. Therefore, Jordan’s jersey number is (*necessarily?!)* a prime number.

Version 2.2

1. Necessarily, if God foreknows x , then x will occur.
2. Necessarily, God foreknows x .
3. Therefore, x will necessarily occur.

Problem: Even though the inference is sound, the second premise is almost certainly false. If created a different world or nothing at all, then God would not necessarily foreknow x . The only possible way to justify the second premise is to maintain that the actual world is the only possible world God could have created, and that God necessarily had to create a world.

Nelson Pike's Version

1. God's being omniscient necessarily implies that if Jones mows his lawn on Saturday afternoon, then God believed at an earlier time that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon.
2. Necessarily, all of God's beliefs are true.
3. No one has the power to make a contradiction true.
4. No one has the power to erase someone's past beliefs, that is, to bring it about that something believed in the past by someone was not believed in the past by that person.
5. No one has the power to erase someone's existence in the past, that is, to bring it about that someone who existed in the past did not exist in the past.
6. So if God believed that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon, Jones can refrain from mowing his lawn only if one of the following alternatives is true:
 - (i) Jones has the power to make God's beliefs false;
 - (ii) Jones has the power to erase God's past belief; or
 - (iii) Jones has the power to erase God's past existence.
7. But alternative (i) is impossible. (from 2 and 3)
8. And alternative (ii) is impossible. (from 4)
9. And alternative (iii) is impossible. (from 5)
10. Therefore, if God believes that Jones will mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon, Jones does not have the power to refrain from mowing his lawn on Saturday afternoon, that is to say, Jones is not free.

Another Version

1. If God exists, then God is omniscient.
2. If God is omniscient, then God foreknows future human actions.
3. If God foreknows future human actions, then humans are not free.
4. Humans are free.

Therefore:

5. God does not foreknow future human actions. [from 3, 4, & *modus tollens*]

Therefore:

6. God is not omniscient. [from 2, 5, & *modus tollens*]

Therefore:

7. God does not exist. [from 1, 6, & *modus tollens*]

Denial of Premise (1.): Functional Theism or Process Theism

Denial of Premise (2.): Divine Timelessness or Open Theism

Denial of Premise (3.): Molinism or Ockhamism

Denial of Premise (4.): Theological Fatalism