

Handout 4: The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge

I. Introduction

A. Two Allegedly Incompatible Propositions

Divine Foreknowledge: God knows (and has always known) every true proposition about the future.

Human Freedom: Some human actions are free.

B. Two Essential Teachings of Western Theistic Religions

Divine Omniscience: God knows every true proposition.

Human Moral Responsibility: Human beings are morally responsible for at least some of their actions.

C. Goals

1. To understand the Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge (i.e., to understand why our freedom is supposed to be incompatible with God's foreknowledge).
2. To gain a little familiarity with some interesting responses to the dilemma (including Aristotelianism and Boethianism).
3. To examine more closely the Ockhamist response.

II. The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge

A. Five Principles that Lie Behind the Argument

Knowledge Entails Truth (KET): Necessarily, if someone knows that a person S will perform action A at time t, then S performs A at t.

Slogan: "If you know something, then it must be true."

Divine Foreknowledge of Action (DFA): Necessarily, if S performs A at t, then at every time prior to t, God knows at that time that S will perform A at t.

Slogan: “God knows everything will you do long before you do it.”

The Fixity of the Past (FP): Necessarily, if event E occurs at time t, then after t it is not within anyone’s power to prevent E’s occurrence at t.

Slogan: “You can’t change the past.”

Transfer of Powerlessness (TP): Necessarily, if (i) it is never within S’s power to prevent event E from occurring, and (ii) E’s occurrence logically entails S’s doing A at t, then it is never within S’s power to avoid doing A at t.

Slogan: “Whatever is necessarily connected with what is necessary in some sense, is itself necessary in that sense” (Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” p. 238).

Freedom Requires the Power to Do Otherwise (FRP): Necessarily, if it is never within S’s power to avoid doing A at t, then S does not do A freely.

Slogan: “Freedom requires the ability to do otherwise.”

B. The Argument

1. I clap my hands at noon today.

[supposition]

2. Necessarily, if I clap my hands at noon today, then God knew in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today.

[instance of DFA]

3. If God knew in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today, then it was never within my power to prevent God’s knowing in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today.

[instance of FP]

4. Therefore, it was never within my power to prevent God's knowing in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today.

[from lines 2, 3, and 4]

5. God's knowing in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today entails that I clap my hands today at noon.

[instance of KET]

6. If (4) and (5), then it was never within my power to avoid clapping my hands at noon today.

[instance of TP]

7. If it was never within my power to avoid clapping my hands at noon today, then I did not clap my hands freely.

[instance of FRP]

8. Therefore, I did not clap my hands freely.

[from lines 4, 5, 6, and 7]

C. Comments on the Argument

- i. Generalizability
- ii. Deductive Validity

III. Replies

A. Incompatibilist Replies

1. Hard Foreknowledgism: argument is sound; no freedom.
2. Atheism: DFA is false because God does not exist.
3. A Non-Defeatist Incompatibilist Alternative?

B. Compatibilist Replies

1. Aristotelianism: Omniscience without foreknowledge: DFA is false because future contingents lack truth value.

Problems for Aristotelianism:

a. Special Relativity

b. Ontology of Time

2. Boethianism: DFA is false because God is atemporal.

Problems for Boethianism:

a. The Dilemma of Freedom and Atemporal Knowledge

3. Ockhamism: FP is false because we have some power over the past.

IV. Ockhamism

Slogan: "God may know what I will do; but I don't do what I do because God knows I will do it; rather, God knows what I will do only because I will do it."

A. Accidental Necessity and Hard Facts vs. Soft Facts about the Past

B. Rejoinder to Ockham

The Fixity of the Hard Past (FHP):

Necessarily, if p is true and is a hard fact about t, then after t it is not within anyone's power to prevent p from being true.

New Premise: God's knowing in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today is a hard fact about 1000 A.D.

C. Ockham's Reply to the Rejoinder

Attributions of knowledge of future events are clearly *soft* facts about the time of the knowledge.

D. Second Rejoinder to Ockham: The Dilemma of Freedom and Forebelief

Infallible Belief Entails Truth (IBET):

Necessarily, if someone S1 believes that a person S2 will perform action A at time t, and S1 is infallible, then S2 performs A at t.

Divine Forebelief of Action (DFbA):

Necessarily, if S performs A at t, then at every time prior to t, God believes at that time that S will perform A at t.

New Premise: God's *believing* in 1,000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today is a hard fact about 1,000 A.D.

E. Ockham's Reply to the Second Rejoinder: Plantinga's Arguments that Facts about God's Past Beliefs Can be Soft

Plantinga's First Argument (pp. 247-248)

1. Any proposition that entails *Heathwood will clap his hands at noon today* is not a hard fact about the past.
2. *God believed in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would clap his hands at noon today* entails *Heathwood will clap his hands at noon today*.
3. Therefore, *God believed in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would clap his hands at noon today* is not a hard about the past.

Plantinga's Second Argument (p. 248)

1. Any proposition logically equivalent to a soft fact is itself a soft fact.
2. *It was true in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would clap his hands at noon today* is a soft fact.
3. *God believed in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would clap his hands at noon today* is logically equivalent to *It was true in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would clap his hands at noon today*.
4. Therefore, *God believed in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would clap his hands at noon today* is a soft fact.

V. An Interesting (and Troubling?) Consequence of Compatibilism: Power Over the Hard Past