

Handout 3:
Ockham's Way Out of the Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge

Recall:

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.

1. The Ockhamist Reply to the DFF Begins with a Counterexample to FP:

- Suppose Dan quit smoking on Sunday.
- Still, after Sunday, it is within his power to make it so that he didn't quit smoking on Sunday:
 - For he could simply have a cigarette.
 - If he were to have a cigarette, then an event that occurred on Sunday – *Dan's quitting smoking* – would not have occurred.
- Thus, we do have power over at least some past events. The past is not fixed.

2. A Rejoinder to Ockham's Reply: Distinguish Hard and Soft Facts about the Past

"That Dan quit smoking isn't *strictly* about the past. It is partly about the future. For whether it is true that a person quit smoking on some day depends on what happens on later days."

So we distinguish:

Soft facts about the past: facts that are nominally about the past, but are such that whether they are true depends on what happens at later times.

Examples:

"Dan quit smoking on Sunday"

"Joe made a false promise last night"

"Yesterday it was true that I would eat breakfast tomorrow."

Hard facts about the past: facts that are genuinely and strictly about the past.

Examples:

"Paul mowed his lawn in 1980."

"I ate breakfast this morning."

"Yesterday I believed that I would eat breakfast tomorrow."

Then we introduce a new principle that (i) is immune from Ockham's kind of counterexample to FP and (ii) can be used in a new foreknowledge argument:

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.

The new argument will contain this premise:

- P3h. If God knew in 1000 A.D. that I would eat breakfast this morning and his knowing this is a hard fact about 1000 A.D., then it is not within my power to prevent God's knowing in 1000 A.D. that I would eat breakfast this morning.

It will also need an added premise:

- P3.5. God's knowing in 1000 A.D. that I would eat breakfast this morning is a hard fact about 1000 A.D.

3. Ockham's Reply to the Rejoinder

FHP is true, and thus so is P3h, but P3.5 is false: facts concerning God's past foreknowledge of future events are *softs facts* about the past.

For to say that God knew in 1000 A.D. that I would eat breakfast this morning is to say at least this:

- (i) God believed in 1000 A.D. that I would eat breakfast this morning
- & (ii) God is justified in that belief
- & (iii) that belief is true.

But clause (iii) is in part about what goes on this morning; this makes the fact that God knew in 1000 A.D. that I would eat breakfast this morning a soft fact about 1000 A.D. Thus, P3.5 is false.

4. 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.

- P3.5b. God's *believing* in 1000 A.D. that I would eat breakfast this morning is a hard fact about 1000 A.D.

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

One goes like this: (P1) Any proposition that entails that Heathwood will eat breakfast tomorrow morning is not a hard fact about the past; (P2) That God believed in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would eat breakfast tomorrow morning entails that Heathwood will eat breakfast tomorrow morning; therefore, (C) That God believed in 1000 A.D. that Heathwood would eat breakfast tomorrow morning is not a hard fact about the past. Thus, P3.5b is false.

Another is based on the principle that any proposition logically equivalent to a soft fact is itself a soft fact.