

On Divine Foreknowledge and Bringing About the Past

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In the past two decades much has been written on the topic of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, perhaps even too much, but there remains, in the recent discussion, an important point of dispute, one that should, I believe, finally be put to rest. The point of dispute concerns the appropriateness of causal-sounding language (i.e., the language of "bring it about that") in the following kind of context: Suppose that an essentially omniscient God should believe at an earlier time T_1 that Smith will perform an action A at a later time T_2 , and suppose that Smith is nonetheless free to refrain from A at T_2 . Does it follow from these suppositions that it is within Smith's power to *bring it about* that God held a different belief at T_1 ? It certainly follows that it is within Smith's power to do something such that, *were he to do it*, God *would have* held a different belief at T_1 . But does it also follow that it is within Smith's power to *bring it about* that God held a different belief at T_1 ?¹ In what follows, I shall argue that such causal-sounding language is altogether appropriate, and it is appropriate for this reason: if there is an essentially omniscient God who holds beliefs in time, then Smith has free will only if he has a certain kind of *power over the past*, only if it is within his power at T_2 actually to *determine* which belief God held at T_1 ; and if Smith does have such power over the past, then it is indeed within his power at T_2 (unexercised of

¹ In the essay that sparked much of the recent discussion, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74 (January 1965), Nelson Pike originally employed such causal-sounding language. But in the face of criticism, particularly that of John Turk Saunders (see "Of God and Freedom," *Philosophical Review* 75 (January 1966), Pike retreated from such causal-sounding language and replaced expressions like "it is within Smith's power at T_2 to *bring it about* that God held a different belief at T_1 " with expressions like "it is within Smith's power at T_2 so to *act that God would have held* a different belief at T_1 ." See Pike, "Of God and Freedom: A Rejoinder," *Philosophical Review* 75 (July 1966), and Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1970), Chapter 4.

course) to bring it about that God held a different belief at T_1 — that is, a different belief from the one he in fact held at T_1 .

I shall divide what follows into two sections. In section i I shall argue that there are at least two true principles from which it follows that, if there is an omniscient God who holds beliefs in time, then free agents do have the power to *bring about* God's past beliefs. In section ii I shall argue further, however, that this conclusion is compatible with at least one of Augustine's solutions to the foreknowledge problem, and that there are powerful reasons for thinking that God's past beliefs about the future could not possibly have the kind of necessity sometimes attributed to other past events or states of affairs. I shall conclude, therefore, that Augustine's solution to the foreknowledge problem is in fact sound and that divine foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom.

i

Suppose, then, that there is a God and that

- (1) God is a necessary being, essentially omniscient, and holds beliefs in time.

We might begin with this question. Does the conjunction of (1) with

- (2) It is within Smith's power to perform an action A at a time T_2

entail

- (3) It is within Smith's power to *bring it about* that God believes at T_1 that Smith will do A at T_2 ?

Certainly the conjunction of (1) with

- (4) Smith does A at T_2

entails

- (5) God believes at T_1 that Smith will do A at T_2 .

But does the conjunction of (1) with (2) entail (3)? I think it is clear that the conjunction of (1) and (2) does *not* entail (3), and I think it is clear for the following reason. Consider a possible world, a deterministic world, in which Smith has the power to do A at T_2 but not the power to refrain from A at T_2 . If in such a world God believes at T_1 that Smith will do A at T_2 , and if God holds this belief on the basis of his assessment of the causal conditions that exist at T_1 , then of course Smith's doing A at T_2 would not *bring it about* that God believes at T_1 that Smith will do A at T_2 . In a case such as this there is no inclination whatsoever to think that God's belief at T_1 , which is based upon his assessment of conditions that existed

at T_1 , depends (in some quasi-causal sense) upon what Smith does at T_2 . So clearly (barring possible quibbles about the meaning of “power”), there is a possible world in which the conjunction of (1) and (2) is true and (3) is false. Hence the conjunction of (1) and (2) does not entail (3).

But suppose now that Smith has both the power to do A at T_2 and the power to refrain from A at T_2 . Then it is indeed true, I think, that the belief God holds at T_1 depends (in some quasi-causal sense) upon what Smith does at T_2 . For consider the biconditional: *God believes at T_1 that Smith will do A at T_2 if, and only if, Smith does A at T_2 .* If Smith has both the power to do A at T_2 and the power to refrain from A at T_2 , then whether or not Smith does A at T_2 is up to Smith, not God. Similarly, if God chooses to leave Smith free with respect to the option of doing A at T_2 , then what belief God holds at T_1 about Smith’s action at T_2 is likewise up to Smith, not God. And this does make it look as if God’s belief at T_1 depends (in some quasi-causal sense) upon what Smith does at T_2 . What I propose to argue, therefore, is not that the conjunction of (1) and (2) entails (3), but rather that the conjunction of (1) and

(2′) It is within Smith’s power to do A at T_2 and it is within his power to refrain from A at T_2 .

entails (3). In other words, Smith’s doing A at T_2 *brings it about* that God holds the relevant belief at T_1 *only if* Smith also has the power to refrain from A at T_2 .

Now what principle might “underwrite” the deduction of (3) from (1) and (2′)? Where ‘S’ is the name of a person and ‘p’ and ‘q’ are propositional variables, one might be tempted to adopt:

P_1 If (a) it is within S’s power to bring it about that p is true and (b) p entails q, then it is also within S’s power to bring it about that q is true;²

and so far as I know, P_1 is just about the only principle discussed in the literature. But unfortunately, P_1 is clearly inadequate. Indeed, we already have a counterexample to P_1 , for, as we have just seen, the conjunction of (1) and (2) above does not entail (3); and other counterexamples have frequently been pointed out.³ My writing this paper entails that $2 + 2 = 4$ but in no way *brings it about* that $2 + 2 = 4$, and, if that example seems contrived, Neil Armstrong’s walking upon the moon entails that there is a

² See, for example, Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, “On Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom,” *Philosophical Studies* 37 (April 1980): 292.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

moon but in no way *brings it about* that there is a moon. So P_1 is clearly false.

But if we look more closely at these last two counterexamples, we shall quickly uncover, I believe, a principle that is not false but clearly true. Both of the above counterexamples depend, it seems, upon this elementary logical point: if p entails q , q might nonetheless be true even though p is false; so even if (in a particular situation) it is up to me whether or not p is true, it might not (in that situation) be up to me whether or not q is true. It might not (in that situation) be up to me whether or not q is true for this reason: it might be that q would have been true regardless of which action within my power I perform. So, for instance, $2 + 2 = 4$ will remain necessarily true whether or not I happen to write a particular paper, and for this reason, I could hardly *bring it about* that $2 + 2 = 4$ by writing a paper. And similarly, in the situation in which Neil Armstrong walks upon the moon, the moon would have existed whether or not he had walked upon it, so his walking upon it could hardly bring it about that there is a moon. It is relatively easy, however, to eliminate all counterexamples of this type. To do so, one need only restrict one's attention to cases where p entails q and the truth of q is logically *incompatible* with the falsity of p , that is, to cases where p and q are logically equivalent. Given the truth of (1), after all, the relation between Smith's doing A at T_2 and the relevant belief God holds at T_1 is that of logical equivalence, not merely that of one-way entailment, and there is no reason why we cannot take advantage of this fact in order to eliminate counterexamples. Accordingly, a true principle that would support the deduction of (3) from (1) and (2') is this:

P_2 If (a) it is within S 's power to bring it about that p is true, (b) it is within S 's power to bring it about that p is false, and (c) p entails q and *not- p entails not- q* , then it is also within S 's power to bring it about that q is true.

And of course it is the second conjunct of (c) that excludes the obvious counterexamples to P_1 . My not writing this paper would in no way entail that $2 + 2 \neq 4$ and Neil Armstrong's not walking upon the moon would in no way entail that there is no moon, so these counterexamples to P_1 are clearly not counterexamples to P_2 .

Indeed, P_2 seems not only true but obviously true. Where p and q are logically equivalent, it could hardly be up to me whether or not p is true unless it were also up to me whether or not q is true.⁴ But still, many

⁴ Of course, where p is a contingent proposition and q is the conjunction of p with $2 + 2 = 4$, p and q will be logically equivalent; and so, as was pointed out to me by Tom Flint, P_2 does have this consequence: If it is within S 's power to bring it about that p is true, then it

instances of P_1 that are not instances of P_2 will also be sound, and this may be a cause of some dissatisfaction with P_2 . Suppose, for instance, that it is within Smith's power to draw an equilateral triangle at T. It follows, most anyone would agree, *both* that it is within his power to draw an equiangular triangle at T and that it is within his power to draw a plane figure at T. But whereas P_2 certainly licenses the first inference, since an equilateral triangle and an equiangular triangle are logically equivalent, it does not license the second, since Smith's not drawing an equilateral triangle in no way entails that he does not draw a plane figure. One might prefer, therefore, a principle that would, in a more general way, distinguish between those cases where the power to bring it about that p is true entails the power to bring it about that q is true and those where, though p entails q, the power to bring it about that p is true does *not* entail the power to bring it about that q is true. And fortunately there does seem to be such a principle. For if p entails q and yet one's having the power to bring it about that p is true does not entail the power to bring it about that q is true, there seems to be but one alternative left: q must be a necessary condition not only of p but also of one's having the *power* to bring it about that p is true.

To see why this is so, compare the case where Armstrong walks upon the moon with one where Smith freely kicks a ball across the street. Between these two cases there is, to be sure, this superficial similarity: Just as

(6) Armstrong walks upon the moon at T

entails

(7) There is a moon at T,

so also does

is also within S's power to bring it about that (p and $2 + 2 = 4$) is true; but though it is within S's power to bring it about that (p and $2 + 2 = 4$) is true, it is not within S's power to bring it about that $2 + 2 = 4$ is true. This consequence seems to me just what one would want, however. The power to bring it about that a conjunction is true does not entail the power to bring it about that each conjunct of that conjunction is true. If it is true, for instance, that the sun will be shining at time T and it is also within my power to go swimming at T, then it is surely within my power to go swimming while the sun is up at T (that is, it is within my power to bring it about that the conjunction: *Talbott goes swimming at T and the sun is shining at T*, is true). It does not follow, however, that it is within my power to bring it about that the sun is shining at T. Moreover, if necessary, one could always restrict one's attention to propositions that do not involve, in Chisholm's sense of "involvement," any necessary truths. (See, for example, "Toward a Theory of Attributes," in *The Philosophy of Nicholas Rescher*, ed. E. Sosa, p. 98.) Then, one could avoid altogether the awkward case where a contingent proposition is conjoined with a necessary truth.

(8) Smith kicks the ball across the street at T

entail

(9) The ball moves across the street at T;

so just as (7) is a logically necessary condition of (6), so also is (9) a logically necessary condition of (8). But between these two cases there is also this all-important difference: Whereas the existence of the moon is required in order for Armstrong even to have *the option* of walking upon it, in order for it even to be within his *power* to walk upon it, the movement of the ball across the street is *not* required in order for it to be within Smith's power to kick it across the street. So whereas (7) is a necessary condition of

(10) It is within Armstrong's power to walk upon the moon at T,
(9) is not a necessary condition of

(11) It is within Smith's power to kick the ball across the street at T.

And surely the dissimilarity between these cases does illustrate a general principle. If *p* entails *q*, then it is within the power of a person *S* to bring it about that *p* is true *only if* at least one of these conditions is met: *either* *q* is true *or*, if not true, then it is within *S*'s power to bring it about that *q* is true. Suppose, then, that *p* entails *q* and it is *not* within *S*'s power to bring it about that *q* is true. It immediately follows that, unless *q* is true, it is not within *S*'s power to bring it about that *p* is true either; it follows, in other words, that *q* is a necessary condition of *S*'s having the power to bring it about that *p* is true. Accordingly, a second true principle that will support the deduction of (3) from (1) and (2') above is this:

P₃ If (a) it is within *S*'s power to bring it about that *p* is true, (b) *p* entails *q*, and (c) *q* is not a necessary condition of *S*'s having the power to bring it about that *p* is true, then it is also within *S*'s power to bring it about that *q* is true.⁵

Once again, it is condition (c) of P₃ that excludes the obvious counterexamples to P₁, but it must also be stressed here that the kind of necessary condition specified in (c) is not a logically necessary condition. My having been alive yesterday is a necessary condition of my having the power to

⁵ I am indebted to Professor William Rowe for helping me to formulate P₃. I am also indebted to Professor William Hasker, who shared with me this principle: "If (a) it is within *S*'s power to bring it about that *p* is true, (b) *p* entails *q*, and (c) *q* is false, then it is also within *S*'s power to bring it about that *q* is true." As Professor Hasker points out, this principle will cover all cases of unexercised power, and of course these are the important cases when discussing the free will problem.

speaking English today, but not a *logically* necessary condition, since it is at least possible that I could have learned English in a day by drug injection. Similarly, that Jones is in jail may be a necessary condition of Smith's having the power to visit with him in jail, but it is not a *logically* necessary condition, since it is again possible that Smith could transport both himself and Jones into the jail with a wink and a nod of the head. But then, it is hardly surprising, I guess, that for those of us who are not omnipotent, not all the necessary conditions of our having the power to do something are logically necessary conditions.

We thus have two true principles, P_2 and P_3 , from which it follows that the conjunction of (1) and (2') above entails (3). I conclude, therefore, that if there is an essentially omniscient God who holds beliefs in time, then free agents do have the power to *bring about* God's past beliefs and therefore do have the (unexercised) power to bring it about that God held different beliefs in the past from those he in fact did hold in the past. But one word of caution at this point. The expression "it is within Smith's power at T_2 to bring it about that God held a different belief at T_1 " is itself a possible source of confusion and should not be taken to imply this: "it is within Smith's power at T_2 to bring it about that God both held, and did not hold, the same belief at T_1 ." For every possible world in which Smith does A at T_2 is one in which God believes at T_1 that he will do A at T_2 , and every world in which he refrains from A at T_2 is one in which God believes at T_1 that he will refrain from A at T_2 ; there are no worlds, in other words, in which God *both believes and does not believe* at T_1 that Smith will do A at T_2 . But suppose now that, in the actual world, Smith *freely* does A at T_2 and thus brings it about that God believes at T_1 that he will do A at T_2 . It still remains true that, *had* he exercised his power to refrain from A at T_2 , he *would have* brought it about that God believed at T_1 that he would refrain from A at T_2 — that is, he *would have* brought it about that God held a different belief at T_1 from the one God did hold in the actual world. And of course that is just the point. If Smith is free either to do A at T_2 or to refrain from A at T_2 (as he chooses), then which of the relevant beliefs God holds at T_1 is up to Smith, not God.

ii

To some, the practical result of our discussion so far will no doubt seem to be this: having established that human freedom is compatible with divine foreknowledge only if human beings have the power to bring about the past, only if they can (and sometimes do) determine the shape of God's past beliefs, we have in effect established that human freedom is *incompatible* with divine foreknowledge. For what could be clearer than that no one, not even an omnipotent being, *now* has the power to bring it about

that someone held a particular belief in the past: What could be clearer than that no one has *this kind* of power over the past? But is this really so clear? At least some theologians anyway, the early Augustine for example, have thought that a backwards dependence relation (of the relevant sort) is quite intelligible and in fact provides a solution to the foreknowledge problem. In this section, therefore, I shall look briefly at a couple of passages from Augustine and suggest that Augustine's solution to the foreknowledge problem is a viable one.

Of course, in his various discussions of divine foreknowledge, Augustine adopts a variety of different positions on different occasions; indeed, by the end of his life, he seemed prepared to deny that any human being, except perhaps Adam, even had free will (of the libertarian sort). But one strain of his thought is nonetheless reflected in the following passage from *City of God*:

It does not follow, therefore, that there is no power in our will because God foreknew what was to be the choice in our will. For . . . if He who foresaw what was to be in our will foresaw, not nothing, but something, it follows that there is a power in our will, even though he foresaw it. . . . For, no one sins because God foreknew that he would sin. In fact, the very reason why a man is undoubtedly responsible for his own sin, when he sins, is because He whose foreknowledge cannot be deceived foresaw, not the man's fate or fortune or what not, but that the man himself would be responsible for his own sin. No man sins unless it is his choice to sin; and his choice not to sin, that, too, God foresaw.⁶

In this passage at least, Augustine seems to suggest that God's knowledge of the future in some way *depends* upon what actually happens in the future. He says, in the first place, that no one sins *because* God foreknew he would, and he says, in the second place, that God foreknows not fate or fortune (or even antecedent sufficient conditions!) but rather the actual power in a person's will and, ultimately, the actual choice that a person makes in the future. It is as if God has the capacity to look into the future and actually to see what's in the future, and to do so in a way analogous to our own recollection of the past. Indeed, the analogy between God's foreknowledge (precognition) of the future and our recollection of the past is one that Augustine explicitly draws in his earlier work, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, where he writes:

Your recollection of events in the past does not compel them to occur. *In the same way* [my emphasis] God's foreknowledge of future events does not compel them to take place. As you remember certain things that you have done and yet have not done all the things that you remember, so God foreknows all the things of which He Himself is the Cause, and yet He is not the Cause of all that He foreknows. He is not the evil cause of these acts . . . for He does not do the things which He knows will happen.⁷

⁶ *The City of God*, Bk. V, chap. x.

⁷ *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Bk. III, chap. IV.

Here Augustine makes it as clear as he possibly can (a) that *nothing* happens simply *because* God foreknew it would, (b) that while God is ultimately the cause of many future events, he is not the cause of our free choices, and (c) that God's infallible foreknowledge of our future choices depends upon those future choices in much the way our own recollection of past choices depends upon those past choices. In other words, it is not *because* God believes at T_1 that Smith will do A at T_2 that Smith in fact does A at T_2 ; it is *because* Smith does A at T_2 that God holds the relevant belief at T_1 . The relation here, then, is one of backwards dependence: since it is up to Smith whether or not he does A at T_2 , it is also up to Smith which belief God holds at T_1 .

Now it seems to me that this line of argument has considerable merit. For one thing, many arguments for theological fatalism are based upon the *assumption* (unargued for) that no backwards dependence relations of the relevant sort are possible, and such arguments simply beg the question against someone who thinks they *are* possible. It is quite true, of course, that we ordinarily think of the past as somehow *closed* or *settled* or *fixed and unalterable* in a sense in which the future is not, and this has led some philosophers to say that propositions about the past, or at least a certain *class* of propositions about the past, have a special kind of necessity that propositions about the future do not have. But there are, I believe, decisive reasons for thinking that God's past beliefs about the future *could not* now be necessary in the same sense that other past events or states of affairs are sometimes thought to be, and they could not now be necessary in that sense because our future actions could not now be necessary in that sense.

To see why this is so, we need a better handle upon the kind of necessity we are talking about in the present context. So to begin with, what kind of necessity is it that supposedly attaches to certain propositions about the past? According to Anthony Kenny, the necessity in question is not *logical* necessity,⁸ and this seems true enough, since there are clearly possible worlds in which, for example, Lincoln was not assassinated in 1865. But if the necessity in question is not logical necessity, what kind of necessity is it? As a partial answer to this question, perhaps two observations can be made initially. First, whereas logical necessity is clearly *independent of time*, the necessity of the past is thought to be *relative to time*; that is, a tenseless proposition such as, *Lincoln is assassinated at T*, is thought to have the relevant kind of necessity after T but not before T. And second, the kind of necessity in question, which I shall call the property of *being unalterably true*, is perhaps best expressed in terms of the concept of

⁸ *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 55.

power — that is, in terms of the kind of power that is *possible* relative to a given time. Perhaps, then, the relevant kind of necessity can formally be defined as follows:

- D_1 A proposition p is *unalterably true* at a time t if, and only if, (a) p is true at t and (b) it is logically impossible that someone should have the power at t to bring it about that p is false.⁹

Now an important point about D_1 , as just formulated, is this. It does not, by itself, commit us to the view that some contingent propositions, for example propositions about the past, are now unalterably true nor does it commit us to the view that no propositions about the future are now unalterably true. Of course, given D_1 , all logically necessary truths are unalterably true at any given time, and, if fatalism is false, there will always be, at any given time, a large class of contingent propositions that, while true, are not unalterably true. But whether or not there is a class of contingent propositions that are now unalterably true, and how such a class might be distinguished, are points that must be established by further argument. If it can be shown that there is such a class of propositions, however, perhaps we *can* retain this modal principle so essential to arguments for theological fatalism:

- P_4 If p entails q and p is unalterably true at a time t , then q is unalterably true at t .

For if p is true, p entails q , and not even an omnipotent being can now bring it about that p is false, then neither can an omnipotent being now bring it about that q is false.

But does this principle together with D_1 really settle the matter in favor of theological fatalism? Clearly not. For suppose that

- (12) God believed yesterday that Smith would break a window tomorrow

and

- (13) Smith will break a window tomorrow

are both true. Given P_4 , one might still argue in one of two opposite directions. One might argue, as theological fatalists do, that because (12) is now unalterably true in the sense specified by D_1 , so also is (13), since (12) entails (13). But one might also argue, as Augustine does, that because

⁹ To avoid unnecessary complications at this point, we may restrict instances of p to propositions that are determinate or specific with respect to time. In other words, *Lincoln was assassinated* would not be an instance of p , though *Lincoln was assassinated in 1865* would be.

(13) is not now unalterably true in the sense specified by D_1 , neither is (12), since (12) entails (13). The one argument is simply the reverse of the other, and, so far as I can tell, no theological fatalist has ever produced anything like an argument for supposing that his way of arguing is superior to Augustine's way of arguing. There is, moreover, a powerful reason, one that seems to me utterly decisive, for thinking that Augustine's way of arguing is in fact sound and that the argument for theological fatalism therefore fails.

Notice first that a theist needs only a very weak premise, the premise that it is *logically possible* that someone should now have the power to prevent Smith from breaking a window tomorrow, in order to prove that (13) is not now unalterably true in the sense specified by D_1 . Suppose, for example, that it is causally determined that Smith will break a window tomorrow, that God (who could interfere with the causal order if he so chose) intends to permit the broken window tomorrow, and that God thus knows that Smith will break a window tomorrow. From these suppositions it follows (let us concede) that Smith is now powerless to prevent the broken window tomorrow, but it does not follow that (13) is now unalterably true either in the sense specified by D_1 or in the sense that

(14) Lincoln was assassinated in 1865

is sometimes thought to be. And this does not follow for two reasons: first, it remains logically possible that Smith should now have the power to prevent the broken window tomorrow; and second, it remains within the (unexercised) power of one person anyway, namely God, to prevent the broken window tomorrow. So even if the future were causally determined and utterly predictable (in part because God chooses not to interfere with the causal order), it still would not follow that (13) is now unalterably true in the sense specified by D_1 . But then, if (13) is not now unalterably true in that sense, neither is (12), since (12) entails (13).

But there is, I believe, a stronger argument yet to be considered at this point, perhaps even a way of proving that God's past beliefs about the future do not have the kind of necessity sometimes attributed to other past events or states of affairs. For consider what grounds there are for thinking that *any* contingent proposition, even (14) above, is now unalterably true in the relevant sense. According to Anthony Kenny, the grounds are these: Because backwards causation is impossible, because our actions have effects in the future but not in the past, Lincoln's assassination is now utterly *inaccessible* to us, and so we are now powerless to obviate Lincoln's assassination for the same reason we are now powerless to bring it

about.¹⁰ And whatever one might think of the claim that backwards causation is impossible, Kenny is surely right concerning this point: *If* it is impossible that someone should now have the power to obviate Lincoln's assassination, then it is also impossible that someone should now have the power to bring it about. In this respect, surely, unalterably true *contingent* propositions, if there are such, are no different from such necessary truths as $2 + 2 = 4$. Since it is impossible that someone should now have the power to obviate the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$, it is also impossible that someone should now have the power to bring it about that $2 + 2 = 4$. And similarly, if it is genuinely possible that someone should now have the power to bring about the existence of unicorns tomorrow, then it is also possible that someone should now have the power to prevent the existence of unicorns tomorrow.

It is tempting, indeed, to adopt as a general principle at this point the following:

- P₅ For any proposition p and time t, it is impossible that someone should have the power at t to bring it about that p is false if, and only if, it is impossible that someone should have the power at t to bring it about that p is true.

But though this principle seems to me quite true as it stands, there may in fact be a plausible counterexample, one that I am prepared to accept at least for the sake of the argument. For suppose that God is a necessary being and in possession of certain essential properties such that it is logically necessary that God acts in certain sorts of ways and pursues certain sorts of goals. Given these assumptions, a proposition such as:

- (I5) At the year 2000 every creature will begin an eternity of endless suffering,

may itself turn out to be necessarily false¹¹ and may turn out to be necessarily false for this reason: It may be logically necessary that God will prevent its being true. But then, if it is logically necessary that God will prevent (I5) from being true, then it is logically impossible that someone will bring it about that (I5) is true; and if it is logically impossible that someone will bring it about that (I5) is true, then it is also impossible, one might argue, that someone should have *the power* to bring it about that (I5) is true. With respect to a proposition such as (I5), therefore, one might argue, with some plausibility, that (a) God does have the power to bring it about that this proposition is false but (b) neither God nor anyone

¹⁰ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹¹ I owe this example to Professor William Rowe.

else could possibly have the power to bring it about that it is true. And similar kinds of remarks might be made concerning a proposition such as:

(16) There exists a favorable balance of good over evil.

One might plausibly argue that (a) God does have the power to bring it about that (16) is true but (b) neither God nor anyone else has the power to bring it about that (16) is false.

Now as I have said, I am prepared to concede, for the sake of the argument, that (15) and (16) may be counterexamples to P_5 .¹² But there is an oddity about these propositions that must nonetheless be kept in mind. By performing an action (or set of actions) in the actual world, God might very well bring it about that (16) is true in the actual world, but he could hardly thereby bring it about that (16) is true in some other possible world. So if (16) is necessarily true, God does not bring it about that (16) is *necessarily true* even if he does bring it about that (16) is true in the actual world. With respect to a proposition such as (16), then, what is contingent, is the way in which it is made true; so with respect to this proposition, it is possible that someone has the power to bring about its truth *in a particular way* only if it is also possible that someone has the power to prevent its being made true *in that particular way*. One of the things that might help to bring about the truth of (16), for example, would be for God to create a world in which persons have the capacity to enjoy sexual pleasure. But if it is so much as possible that someone has the power to bring about the truth of (16) *in that particular way*, then it is also possible that someone has the power to prevent its being made true *in that particular way*. Because, moreover, God will bring about the truth of (16) in a particular way precisely by bringing it about that certain contingent propositions are true, it should not be difficult to circumvent altogether the perplexities posed by such an example. To do so, one need only to restrict one's attention to contingent propositions and to restate P_5 as:

¹² My own suspicion is that (15) and (16) are not counterexamples to P_5 , though my reason for thinking this is apt to be unpersuasive. But if God, as a necessary being in possession of certain essential properties, necessarily acts in certain sorts of ways, then one should, I think, accept this awkward consequence: for some of God's powers, it is logically impossible that he will ever exercise them. It seems to me that, in the fullest sense, God does have the power to lie, for instance, even if it is logically impossible that he will ever have a morally sufficient reason — or that he will ever want — to exercise that power. But since the view that God has powers that he exercises in no possible world whatsoever is apt to seem implausible, to say the least, I am conceding, for the sake of the argument, that (15) and (16) are counterexamples to P_5 .

- P₆ For any *contingent* proposition p and time t, it is impossible that someone should have the power at t to bring it about that p is false if, and only if, it is impossible that someone should have the power at t to bring it about that p is true.

Let us say, therefore, that

- D₂ A proposition p is *logically inaccessible* at a time t if, and only if, it is logically impossible *both* (a) that someone should have the power at t to bring it about that p is true *and* (b) that someone should have the power at t to bring it about that p is false.

And let us admit, for the sake of the argument, that some propositions about the past, for example (14) above, are now logically inaccessible in this sense and thus are, if true at all, unalterably true at the present time. It seems utterly obvious, however, that for any given time at which there are persons performing actions, there will be an indefinitely large number of propositions that are not logically inaccessible at that time. Suppose, for instance, that at a time T₂ Smith flings a rock at a particular glass window and in the next instant, call it T₃, the rock smashes against the glass and causes it to shatter. From this supposition two consequences follow: first that the proposition

- (17) The window is shattered at T₃

is true, and second that at T₂ Smith brings it about that (17) is true. But if at T₂ Smith brings it about that (17) is true, then at T₂ it is possible that someone has the power to bring it about that (17) is true; and if at T₂ it is possible that someone has the power to bring it about that (17) is true, then at T₂ (17) is not logically inaccessible in the sense specified by D₂. Indeed, if a person performs any action at all, there is presumably some event that he *brings about* — e.g., the movement of an arm, a brick flying through a window, etc. — and it is in virtue of his bringing about this event that some proposition of the form, *S does A at T*, is in fact true. So if a person performs any action at all, he brings it about that some proposition is true; and at any time at which he brings it about that a proposition p is true, it is possible that someone has the power to bring it about that p is true. At any time at which there are persons performing actions, therefore, there will be a large number of propositions describing those actions (and the effects of those actions) that are not logically inaccessible at that time. But then, if at T₂ a proposition such as (17) is not logically inaccessible, neither is it then unalterably true — since, according to P₆, it is possible that someone has the power to bring it about that (17) is true only if it is also possible that someone has the power to bring it about that (17) is false. Since, moreover, (17) both entails and is entailed by

(18) God believes a T_1 that the window will be shattered at T_3 ,

it follows, given P_4 , that at T_2 (18) is not yet unalterably true either. The sum of the matter, then, can perhaps be put this way: If the fatalist's claim is that certain propositions about the past are now necessary for this reason: our actions have no effects in the past, the theist can always reply as follows: Certain propositions about the future could not now be necessary in that sense, because our actions (and God's actions all the more) unquestionably do have effects in the future. And if certain propositions about our actions in the present and the effects of those actions in the future could not now be necessary in the relevant sense, then no propositions about the past that entails one of these propositions could now be necessary in that sense either. But then, if a proposition of the form: *Yesterday God believed that Smith would do A tomorrow*, is not now necessary, is not now unalterably true in the sense specified by D_2 , then it is at least possible that you and I do have the power to bring about God's past beliefs.

I conclude, therefore, that Augustine's solution to the foreknowledge problem is in fact sound, and that a theist who accepts the argument of the first half of this paper — who accepts, that is, principles P_2 and P_3 of section i — need have no fear that theological fatalism somehow lurks around the corner.¹³

¹³ A shorter version of his paper was presented at the Western Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association in April, 1983. I am indebted to Tom Flint, the official commentator on that occasion, for several helpful comments, to Philip Quinn and William Hasker for some valuable correspondence on the topic of the paper, and especially to William Rowe, who, as director of an NEH summer seminar, inspired me to write it.