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 Semicompatibilism 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 exhaustive 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 defend 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 otherwise. 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 reason 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 T₂ explains why it was true at past times that Jones would do X at T₂. 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 T₂ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than X at T₂. 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 T₂ explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than X at T₂. 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 T₂ that explains why Jones cannot do otherwise than X at T₂. 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 T₂ and Jones's doing X at T₂.

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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 bootstrapping 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 disjoining what I call "conciliatory stories" about the mechanics of divine foreknowledge. 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 mention a few. By doing so, I aim to highlight the widespread appeal of the indirect response.

First, consider Molinism. As Fischer himself sees it (40), the aim of Molinists 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 response. For this reason, I think Fischer's arguments for the irrelevance of Molinism 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 versions 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 $T_2$ explains 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 "Philosophical 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. 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:

\[(FP) \text{ For any action } Y, \text{ agent } S, \text{ and time } T, \text{ if it is true that if } S \text{ were to do } Y \text{ at } T, \text{ some fact about the past relative to } T \text{ would not have been a fact, then } S \text{ cannot at (or just prior to) } T \text{ do } Y \text{ at } T. \text{ (p. 5)}\]

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

\[(FP^*) \text{ An agent } S \text{ has it in his power at (or just prior to) } T \text{ in possible world } w \text{ to do } X \text{ at } T \text{ only if there is a possible world } w^* \text{ with the same past as that of } w \text{ up to } T \text{ in which } S \text{ does } X \text{ at } T. \text{ (p. 6)}\]
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).

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') 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.

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 (FPw) on p. 126.

2 Fischer has agreed in conversation that the shift to (FP,) 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 re-formulate (FP*) as:

\[(FP^*)\] 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 \((S \text{ does } Y \text{ at } T)\) and \((F \text{ is a fact about the past})\).

And (C3) implies

\[(C4)\] There is a possible world \(w^*\) in which both \((S \text{ does } Y \text{ at } T)\) and \((F \text{ is a fact about the past})\).

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 \((S \text{ does } Y \text{ at } T)\) and \((F \text{ is a fact about the past})\).

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 (FP₄), it follows that

(FP₄) 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 (FP₄) 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 (FP₄) should also accept

(FP₅) 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 (FP₅) as:

(FP₅*) 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 (FP₅*), 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 (FP₅). But (FP₅) is equivalent to (FP₅*), 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-

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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⁶ For Fischer's doubts about the fatalist's argument, see his comments on pp. 131, 150-151, and 219.
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:

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 fundamentally misguided.

Indeed, those who consider the matter carefully are likely (especially, perhaps, 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 Plantinga. 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 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.

Fischer might respond to such a *tu quoque* by pointing again to the prephilosophical 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. 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. 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.
incompatibilism is correct, but it should give one concern. By offering an attractive (well, attractive to many) "nuts and bolts" account of how foreknowledge 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 consequences 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.

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

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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 eternity (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). Theological sempiternalism is controversial, as is the claim that we can ascribe truth- or falsity-attimes 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 disquotation principle:

$$(D) \text{Necessarily, } S \text{ does } X \text{ at } T_2 \text{ iff ‘} S \text{ will do } X \text{ at } T_2 \text{’ was true at } T_1. \ (T_1 < T_2)$$

$$(D)$$ 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. 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 predicing 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 T₂, where X is some ordinary act such as raising one’s hand. It follows that God believed at T₁ that S would do X at T₂. Given God’s essential omniscience, God’s belief at T₁ entails that S does X at T₂. Thus, in all possible worlds in which God believes at T₁ that S will do X at T₂, S will do X at T₂; so in any world in which S does not do X at T₂, God doesn’t believe at T₁ that S does X at T₂. It seems to follow from … [FP-1] that S does not have it in his power at or just prior to T₂ to refrain from X-ing at T₂ (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 T₂, and that God exists and is essentially sempiternally omniscient (assumptions). Then:

1. God believed at T₁ (the proposition that can be expressed, in English, by) ‘S will do X at T₂.’

2. Necessarily, if (1), then S does X at T₂.

3. The state of affairs described by (1) belongs to the actual past relative to T₂.

4. S has the power, at (or just prior to) T₂, to refrain from doing X at T₂, only if it is possible that: God believed ‘S will do X at T₂’ at T₁, but S refrains from doing X at T₂.
(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 \(T_i\) occurs before \(T_{2_i}\). \((4^*)\) 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 \(T_{2_i}\)” is true at \(T_i\) as well as (ii) facts pertaining to the occurrence of divine beliefs at \(T_i\) about future human actions are soft facts about \(T_i\). 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 T₁ about Jones at T₂ could be a soft fact about the past relative to T₂ 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. 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. 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-supervenches-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 T2) the truth of ‘S will do X at T2’ at T1 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 T2’ 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,

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 $T_2$.\footnote{Cf., e.g., Fischer (2016: 131, 153; 1983: 92; 1986: 593; 1989b: 35-36).}

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?\footnote{Thanks to John Fischer for alerting me to this question (personal correspondence.).} To answer this question let us look more closely at (B). The most natural way to understand it, it seems, is as follows:
(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 For helpful comments and discussions I am grateful to John Martin Fischer, Robin Le Poidevin, Carlo Rossi, Christian Weidemann, Alastair Wilson, and especially Justin McBrayer and Katherine Dormandy.
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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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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. 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.

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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)

(FP) is, however, notoriously vulnerable to objections based on alleged counterexamples involving backtracking counterfactuals. 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

54–60; 'Foreknowledge, Freedom, and Fixity'; 117–18; 'Engaging with Pike'; 166.) For the reasons explained in the text, I find this attitude puzzling.

6 Similar formulations are to be found in many of the papers reprinted in OF, as well as in Fischer 1994. See note 2 above for the possibility of restricting the principle to 'hard' facts about the past.

7 See, for example, 'Power over the Past', 'Foreknowledge, Freedom, and Fixity', and the 'Introduction' to OF.
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)

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

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 be-
lieves that he has) the ability to go skating on Tuesday. (Let us refer to this as 'the ability to go skating T'.) 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 T. 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 skating T). 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 T, 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 skating T, 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 incom-
patibilist’s Fixity Principle (FP*). Nevertheless, this does not undermine the
importance of Fischer’s ingenious and provocative discussion of these issues.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} Thanks to Robert Frazier for helpful discussion of drafts of this paper.
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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

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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 address—the point about the fixity of the past? That is, if a hard fact about the past is now fixed and out of our control 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 temporal intrinsicality, both of which seem plausible, then it would seem more reasonable to conclude 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 independent 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 refrain 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 \rightarrow \text{it being true at } t_1 \text{ that Jones will mow } \rightarrow \text{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.*

* For helpful comments thanks to Matt Frise, Kevin McCain, Andrew Moon and Patrick Todd.


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,
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 otherwise 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 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 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 uncontroversial 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 additional 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 considering 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 $T_0$ and if God has the relevant kind of foreknowledge, it seems to follow, and Byerly 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 incompatibility argument (as I have defended it). Byerly writes:

First, Fischer's preferred regimentation of the principle of the fixity of the past has it that 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 $T_1$ 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 $T_1$ 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 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. (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 $T_1$.)

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-
stering 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, skepticismism 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 skepticismism, 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 illustration 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 central 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 responding to the argument for logical fatalism) as Plantinga employs (and I criticize). 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 incompatibilism 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 controversial 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 incompatibilism 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-
argument 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 $T_1$; 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 \(w^*\) with the same past as that of \(w\) up to \(T\) in which \(S\) does \(X\) at \(T\).

Mackie further notes that a compatibilist 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 “suspiciously 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.’) 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. 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 skating.) 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, as a reason for going skating on Tuesday. So he would obviously be crazy to follow the Accessibility 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 compatib-
blist 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, )” 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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