

Geachianism

In his 1977 monograph, *Providence and Evil*, P.T. Geach articulated a position on divine omniscience, future contingents, and providence that has been widely interpreted as a version of (or precursor to) ‘open theism’. Unfortunately, however, and despite Geach’s philosophical eminence, the distinctive view which he proposed has had little impact on the massive literature on such topics.¹ Indeed, those philosophers – with one primary exception – who have read *Providence and Evil* have either failed to notice that Geach was arguing for a radically new view on the logic of future contingents or have not thought it worth commenting on. Admittedly, this is perhaps because Geach himself did not systematically develop the distinctive view he was proposing. I aim to do so here, albeit in a non-exhaustive, preliminary way. I call the resulting view *Geachianism*.² Though Geach’s view is certain to be controversial, I claim that it deserves the status of a theoretical contender in these debates. Moreover, a discussion of Geach’s view illuminates various subtle and fascinating points about the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge not previously noticed in the literature on these topics.

The plan of the paper is as follows. To set the stage, I first briefly present the most sophisticated characterization of ‘open theism’ on offer, one recently developed by Alan Rhoda.³ Having other ‘open-theistic’ views on the table will allow us to better understand and situate Geach’s view. Second, I explain and motivate Geach’s view of future contingents, and respond to some of the objections it faces, notably those made by Jonathan Kvanvig, in what is (as far as I know) the only explicit discussion of Geach’s view in the philosophical literature.⁴ Next, I show how such a view enables a particular reply to the argument for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and freedom of Nelson Pike’s seminal 1965 paper, ‘Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action’.

¹ This is a deficiency my coauthors (John Martin Fischer and Neal Tognazzini) and I have recently tried to remedy. See Fischer et al 2009. We give a brief sketch of the Geachian view I here develop at length.

² However, just as there is sometimes question as to whether Aristotle is an Aristotelian, there may likewise be question whether Geach is a Geachian. As I remarked, Geach did not systematically develop his position on these matters. Thus, while the position I develop seems to me to be the plain consequence of what Geach suggests, in what follows I may go beyond what Geach himself would endorse.

³ See Rhoda 2008.

⁴ See Kvanvig 1986, ch. 1.

Historically, however, open theism has not been a mere reaction to this argument, but has had distinctively theological motivations stemming from a (putative) ‘plain reading’ of certain scriptural passages and the desire for a particular account of divine providence. An application of Geach’s view to such topics will show that it has certain advantages over traditional ‘open’ views.

Rhoda on ‘generic open theism’

First, Rhoda thinks all open theists must be committed to theism (rather than *process theism*) and indeterminism, or the ‘causal openness’ of the future.⁵ As Rhoda notes, the primary, historical motivation for the adoption of indeterminism amongst theists has been the (putative) existence of *libertarian freedom*, the exercise of which requires indeterminism. Now, on Rhoda’s view, open theists depart from other indeterminist theists in maintaining that if it is causally open whether some state of affairs occurs at some time, then it is impossible for God to know beforehand that it will or will not occur. Ockhamists and Molinists, for instance, maintain that, of the causally possible futures, God knows that some *particular* future is the actual one. Open theists (says Rhoda) demur; on open theism, the future is ‘epistemically open’ for God in the sense that there are some states of affairs such that God neither knows that they *will* obtain nor that they *will not* obtain. This is the central feature of Rhoda’s characterization of ‘generic open theism’.

In brief, the characterization is ‘generic’ in the sense that it is neutral between the camps of the two most prominent open theist positions. According to one camp, future contingents – propositions which say of some undetermined event that it will happen – are never true. On this view, if it is causally open whether X obtains at t_3 , then it cannot even be *true* at (some earlier time) t_1 that X will obtain at t_3 . And if it is not true at t_1 that X will obtain at t_3 , then God (given his essential omniscience) does not believe at t_1 that X will (or will not) obtain at t_3 . The future is thus epistemically open for God in the sense at stake. We may call those in this camp ‘open future open theists’. In this camp, there is yet another important division: those who maintain that the relevant future contingent propositions are neither true nor false (hence denying bivalence) and those who believe such propositions are uniformly false. This is an important (and often neglected) distinction,

⁵ The relationship between process theism and open theism is historically complex, but I need not enter into the relevant details. In short, open theists have consistently wished to distinguish their views from those of process theists, who *inter alia* deny creation *ex nihilo* and God’s ability to unilaterally intervene in the world in the ways imagined by traditional theists.

and interested readers would do well to consult Rhoda's work on these issues.⁶ Prominent open future open theists include (anachronistically, controversially, and somewhat tendentiously) Aristotle⁷ and J.R. Lucas (who deny bivalence)⁸, and Charles Hartshorne⁹ and Rhoda himself (who do not).¹⁰

The other prominent open theist camp does not maintain that future contingent propositions are not *true*, but that it is impossible for God to know them, despite their being true. This impossibility generates the relevant divine epistemic openness. According to this version of open theism, it is logically impossible for God to know how future indeterminacies (such as our free decisions) will unfold. Assuming indeterminism, then it follows that the future is epistemically open for God. Taking after Rhoda, we may call this version 'limited foreknowledge open theism'. Richard Swinburne and William Hasker have been the primary defenders of this version of open theism, though Peter van Inwagen has recently defended it as well.¹¹

Rhoda's analysis of 'generic open theism' helpfully shows what these versions of open theism have in common. Both maintain that the future is epistemically open for God. That is, both maintain that there are some possibly future states of affairs such that God knows neither that they will nor will not obtain. And it would seem that this thesis is essential to open theism; it apparently captures its defining feature – what puts the 'open' in 'open theism', as Rhoda says. Indeed, how could one be an open theist if one *denies* that there are some things about which God neither knows that they will nor will not happen? If for every state of affairs, God knows that it will happen or that it will not happen, the future would plainly be epistemically *settled* for God, as Rhoda puts it. Of the

⁶ See, e.g., Rhoda et al. 2006.

⁷ Though Aristotle is widely interpreted as denying bivalence for future contingents in *On Interpretation 9*, some philosophers – notably Anscombe – have disputed this.

⁸ See Lucas 1989.

⁹ By including Hartshorne here, I do not mean to imply that Hartshorne is himself an open theist; he is, rather, a process theist whose views on future contingents are amenable both to process theism and open theism. Hartshorne was the first (of which I am aware) to defend the view that future contingents are uniformly false. According to Hartshorne (and later Rhoda), if at *t*₁ it is not determined that X happens at *t*₃ (or does not happen at *t*₃), then at *t*₁ it is false that X will happen at *t*₃ and it is false that X will not happen at *t*₃. 'Will' and 'will not' are *contraries* rather than *contradictories*. Even if the view in question entered contemporary discussion primarily through Prior (Rhoda's primary source for the view), as seems to be the case, it would be unseemly not to credit Hartshorne here. Even if he is not an open theist, his view can be (and has been) adopted by open theists. See Hartshorne 1965 for his development of the view.

¹⁰ See Rhoda et al. 2006. See also Prior 2003. Prior seems to *formulate* the view in question (see especially p. 54's discussion of Peirce), but does not unambiguously endorse it, and in places would seem to deny bivalence. Prior's work on this matter is complicated, and for the purposes of this paper I set aside the question of his actual views.

¹¹ See Swinburne 1993, Hasker 1989, and van Inwagen 2008.

myriad causally possible futures, God would know that some one of them is *the actual one*. If we think of causal possibility in terms of branches off a single path, God would see that one such branch is ‘lit up’ with what Nuel Belnap and Mitchell Green have called ‘the thin red line’, indicating that *it* is the special branch – the one that uniquely *will* obtain, the one which is such that it is *going to happen*.¹² And this is just the traditional view of divine foreknowledge. Such considerations would appear to be decisive, but they are decisive only under the supposition that something that is going to happen cannot later be such that it is no longer going to happen – only under the supposition, that is, that *the future cannot change*. Geach denies this. To these issues I now turn.

Geach and the mutability of the future

As I remarked at the outset, it would be an understatement to say that Geach’s views about future contingents have not been widely influential. But what is the view?

To begin, what is distinctive of Geach’s view is that it is possible for something to be such that, at *t*₁, it will happen at *t*₃, but at *t*₂ such that it will not happen at *t*₃. That is, at *t*₁, it was true that X would happen at *t*₃, but at *t*₂, something intervened to make it the case that X would not happen at *t*₃. The future thus *changes* in the sense that something was going to happen, but now no longer is going to happen, and does not happen. In support of his case, Geach points to the logic of *prevention*. According to Geach, those things are *prevented* from happening which were such that they were *going to happen* but nevertheless do not happen. Moreover, if something is *going to happen*, then it *will* happen; these expressions are logically equivalent.¹³ The result is that what will occur as of one time may later be such that it will not occur. It seems best to let Geach (largely) speak for himself. In considering one example, Geach asks rhetorically:

But what then is prevented? Not what did happen, but assuredly what was going to happen.

The aeroplane was going to crash into the sea and 100 men were going to be drowned; the

¹² Belnap and Green 1994.

¹³ Some may dispute this claim. In its defense, I merely note that it is plausible to suppose that if something is going to happen, then it will happen, and conversely, that if something will happen, it is going to. I return to this issue in fn. 26.

pilot's prompt action prevented this. For not everything that does not happen is prevented: only what was going to happen.¹⁴

Geach says he takes it as a 'truism' that 'anything that is prevented is something that was going to happen but didn't happen'. He then asks:

But if something did happen, doesn't this show it was after all going to happen? Certainly; but not that it *always* was going to happen. Perhaps, before the preventative action was taken, not this but something else was going to happen; but then the preventative action was taken, and after that *this* was going to happen and did happen. Before the pilot's daring manoeuvre, the plane was going to crash; but after that the plane was going to land safely and did land safely.¹⁵

Geach goes on:

So what was going to happen at an earlier time may not be going to happen at a later time, because of some action taken in the interim. This is the way we can change the future: we can and often do bring it about that it will not be the case that *p*, although before our action it was going to be the case that *p*; it was right to say, then, 'It is going to be the case that *p*'. Before the operation it was right to say 'Johnny is going to bleed to death from the injury': after the operation this was no longer the case.¹⁶

So the view is that the future is *mutable* in a particular way. On open future views, we often so act that we give the future a more determinate shape; we sometimes make it so that (previously) what only *might* or *will probably* happen becomes such that now it simply *will* happen. Geach's view is different. We change the future in a more radical way: we make it so that what will happen ends up not happening, or that what previously was such that it will not happen *does* happen. What will happen changes. No other view – 'open' or otherwise – maintains this distinctive thesis.

¹⁴ Geach 1977: 47.

¹⁵ Geach 1977: 48.

¹⁶ Geach 1977: 50.

I believe we can best understand Geach's position by contrasting it with the other possible views on whether a future contingent proposition can change its truth-value over time. For simplicity, I consider only other *tensed* views which take it that in saying 'X will happen at t_{10} ', one expresses a proposition in which the future tense is fundamental and irreducible; one does *not* express a proposition like 'X happens at t_{10} '. Consider:

(P) X will happen at t_{10}

Suppose (P) is future contingent. Can (P) change its truth-value over time? There are three (somewhat arbitrarily named) options we must consider. Intuitively, the three options are no change, change in one direction only, and change in both directions. Consider first:

The standard tensed theory of time: (P) cannot go from being false to being true, and cannot go from being true to being false until t_{10} is present.

According to what I am calling the 'standard' tensed view, (P) cannot go from being false to true, and can only go from true to false *once t_{10} is present or in the past*. On the tensed view, recall, a proposition like (P) is *not* reducible to a tenseless proposition; the tense is fundamental or basic. So while 'X will happen at t_{10} ', if true, has always been true up until t_{10} , it becomes false at and after t_{10} . That is, if t_{10} is in the present or past, it is false that something *will* happen at t_{10} .

The next option to consider is the one endorsed by those who believe there are no true future contingent propositions, such as open future open theists. If future contingents are uniformly false, then we have:

The open-bivalentist tensed theory of time: (P) can go from being false to being true, but cannot go from being true to being false until t_{10} is present.

And if future contingents are neither true nor false:

The open-non-bivalentist tensed theory of time: (P) can go from being neither true nor false to being true, but cannot go from being true to being neither true nor false (or false), until t_{10} is present.

On the view in question, it is not true that X *will* happen at t_{10} unless it is causally necessary that X happens at t_{10} . Such causal factors may not be in place at t_1 , but may come into place at t_3 . Thus, at t_3 it becomes true (whereas it was previously false, or neither true nor false) that X will happen at t_{10} . In this way, a proposition about the future can become true. Once X is determined to occur at t_{10} , it cannot later become undetermined that it occurs at t_{10} . Thus, (P) cannot go from being true to being false (or neither true nor false), at least until t_{10} is present or past, in which case (P) will be false for the reasons just given on the 'standard' view.

The last view is Geach's.

Geachianism: (P) can go from being true to being false, and from being false to being true, but must remain false when t_{10} is present or past.

We have seen the reasons Geach cites for thinking that (P) can change its truth values in these ways. X could have been going to happen, but got prevented from happening. In that case, (P) goes from true to false. On the other hand, perhaps X was not going to happen, but something arose which prevented what was going to happen, with the result that now X *is* going to happen. In that case, (P) goes from being false to being true. In sum, then, we have three intuitive options concerning whether (P) can change in truth value (before t_{10}): no change in truth value (the standard view), change in one direction only (open future views), and change in both directions (Geachianism).

On behalf of Geachianism

Well, what can be said on behalf of Geachianism? The first thing to say on its behalf is simply that we very often *say* that things were going to happen but were prevented from happening. The plane was going to crash, but it didn't. Johnny was going to bleed to death, but he didn't. And not only do we say these things, but they seem true. Once we recognize it as such, the mutability of the

future actually turns out to be a presupposition of a wide range of our discourse. So the first thing to say on behalf Geachianism is that it very often seems true to say that the future changed.

Of course, many will want to attempt to explain away the appearances here. The second thing to say on behalf of Geachianism is that explaining it all away turns out to be surprisingly difficult. Recall Geach's example of the plane crash; the plane was going to crash, but the pilot prevented this from happening. The most obvious way to try to explain away the appearance of a changing future here is to maintain that it was never true that the plane was going to crash *simpliciter*, but only that it was going to crash *unless some preventative action is taken*. In other words, one interprets 'The plane is going to crash' as elliptical for a merely *conditional* claim. Geach anticipates this response. As he says,

I am prepared for the objection that I have been systematically equivocating upon two senses of 'going to happen': what actually will happen, and – well, what? What will happen if nothing prevents it, perhaps. My complaint now is not that this phrase just boils down to 'What will happen unless it doesn't'; for I myself do not identify what does not happen with what is prevented. But I do say that the explanation is useless. For what is prevented is always something that is going to happen, in the very sense of 'going to happen' that we are supposed to be explaining; 'prevent' has to be explained in terms of *this* 'going to happen', so we cannot use 'prevent' to explain it. As for the 'actually' in 'what will actually happen', it has no more logical force than a thump on the table has.¹⁷

In other words, Geach claims that some notion of something's 'going to happen' is required for an analysis of prevention. The point is subtle, yet important. What is prevented is that which was *in some sense* going to happen. But in what sense? Here, one cannot say: what was going to happen unless something prevented it. For this sense of 'going to happen' already *includes* the notion of prevention, and what we are looking for is the sense in which what is prevented was 'going to happen'. According to Geach, prevention cannot be properly analyzed without appeal to what is 'going to happen'. Thus, this way of explaining away the appearance of a changing future fails.

Of course, this strategy of responding to Geach would be back on the table if one could provide an alternative account of prevention – an account that does not identify the prevented with what was going to happen but did not. Again, the objector wishes to explain away the appearance of a changing future in Geach's examples; it was never really true that the plane was going to crash, only that it was going to crash unless prevented from crashing. But here Geach complains that what

¹⁷ Geach 1977: 51-2

is prevented *just is* what was going to happen. Geach's (unspoken) challenge, then, is to provide an analysis of prevention that does not identify the prevented with what was going to happen but didn't. And, in the only critical discussion of Geach's view of which I am aware, Jonathan Kvanvig aims to do precisely that.¹⁸ To Kvanvig's analysis I now turn.

Kvanvig on prevention

As an analysis of prevention, Kvanvig offers us this:

The truth of p is prevented by S =df. S 's *doing* A is causally sufficient in the circumstances for the falsity of p , and the circumstances apart from S 's *doing* A are such that p would have been true, were those circumstances to obtain.¹⁹

Kvanvig analyzes what it is for an *action* to prevent the truth of a *proposition*. However, we might wish for a more general account of prevention; while the sort of prevention at issue concerns human actions, presumably non-agential causes can still be preventative. Moreover, I find it more natural to think in terms of one *event* preventing another. Hence, I propose to replace Kvanvig's analysis with the following (compatible) analysis, where X and Y are *events*:

X is prevented by Y =df. Y is causally sufficient for X 's failing to obtain, and had Y not obtained, X would have obtained.

Let us call the proposed analysis *the counterfactual analysis of prevention*. The idea here is simple enough. On this analysis, the pilot's action prevented the crash because, had the pilot not acted, the plane would have crashed, and the pilot's action was sufficient for the plane's not crashing. Isn't this a satisfactory analysis of prevention? Geach identifies the prevented as that which was going to

¹⁸ There is a brief statement of Geach's view in Anthony Kenny's 1987: 53-54. There is also a discussion of Geach's view of the future in the Introduction to Fischer 1989: 23-25. In short, Fischer – taking after Kvanvig – represents Geach as claiming that truths about the future are only *apparently* about the future, and are really about the present tendencies of things. But these issues are orthogonal to my purposes in this paper; I thus set them aside. Also, Alfred Fredosso has a brief mention of the view in his 1986, as does Michael Dummett in his 1982: 87.

¹⁹ Kvanvig 1986: 10.

happen but did not. Kvanvig's counterfactual account identifies it as what would have happened had something else not.²⁰

But the counterfactual account of prevention faces problems. First, it appears to lead to an explosion of preventions. Consider the following case. Presumably nearly everyone in Los Angeles went to bed at roughly the normal hour last night. Now, what would have happened had they not? Well, it is hard to say, but we can imagine that there would have been some additional car-crashes today (on account of drowsy drivers) and perhaps some additional fights (on account of irritability), and a great deal else. But everyone's going to bed at the normal hour was causally sufficient for these things not happening. Now, suppose some intrepid reporter at the L.A. Times, desperate for a story, and getting hold of the counterfactual account of prevention, pens the following:

Actions of L.A. Residents Prevent Car Crashes and Fights

In what would prove to be a fortunate turn of events, most L.A. residents went to bed at the normal hour last night, thereby preventing the great many car crashes and fights that would have resulted had they not.

This is not an altogether comfortable result for the counterfactual account of prevention. One might think it more appropriate to deny that L.A. residents going to bed at the normal hour prevented all this from happening. But the counterfactual account of prevention would have it that this is precisely what they did. Examples such as this could be multiplied *ad nauseum*, but the point is clear. A great many things that would have happened had something else not are not generally thought to have been *prevented* from happening. Geach has a diagnosis of why not: they were never going to happen in the first place.

Of course, this problem for the counterfactual account of prevention does not (so it seems to me) *decisively refute* the account. It is open to one to simply maintain that everyone's going to sleep at the normal time did prevent these things. But there are other potential problems for the view.

Consider this example suggested to me by Kenneth Boyce:

²⁰ Other philosophers have sought to analyze prevention counterfactually. The literature on this topic has as its primary origin attempts to understand the nature of *causation*. That is, the central questions are, e.g. whether preventions can be causes, whether by catching a ball that was headed towards a window, I prevent the window's being broken, even if you would have caught the ball anyway, and so on. See, e.g. Dowe 2001. I believe Dowe's analysis, while slightly different than Kvanvig's, is subject to the same problems.

Nuclear war is not going to happen because our adversaries have firmly decided that they will not launch their nuclear weapons (in such a way as to causally settle the matter), regardless of whether Obama chooses to sign the peace treaty or not. But Obama does sign the peace treaty, and his doing so is also causally sufficient for nuclear war's not happening. However, in all the nearest worlds in which Obama does not sign the peace treaty, it is because McCain won the election. And in all those worlds, McCain launches *our* nuclear weapons, thereby causing nuclear war. So we have it that Obama does something that is causally sufficient for nuclear war's failing to occur, and we have it that had Obama not signed the treaty, nuclear war would have occurred. Yet it is false that Obama prevented nuclear war, since our adversaries had already decided not to launch the nuclear weapons regardless of whether he signs the treaty.

Geach, however, is not susceptible to this problem: given the firm intentions of our adversaries, nuclear war is not going to happen, and thus Obama does not prevent it by signing the treaty. But there are several features of this counterexample that deserve brief comment. First, it relies on the Lewis-Stalnaker account of the truth of counterfactuals, namely that their truth is determined by so-called 'nearness' to the actual world. Second, it exploits overdetermination: Obama's signing the treaty overdetermines that there is no nuclear war. Third, it relies on the truth of a *backtracker*: had Obama not signed the treaty, then McCain would have been elected (and would have launched our nuclear weapons). This last feature of the case is, of course, especially controversial; many would balk at the notion that this counterfactual is true. However, certainly many accept that such backtrackers are sometimes true, and thus this counterexample would seem to have some degree of purchase.

At any rate, what is clear is that the counterfactual account of prevention faces problems, problems the diagnosis of which seem to point towards Geachianism. And whether *any* counterfactual analysis of prevention can be successful is far from clear – especially so clearly successful as to make its adoption mandatory in the face of Geach's. However, if indeed no counterfactual account of prevention can be successful, then what would seem the most promising way of explaining away the appearance of a changing future is lost. Reconsider Geach's plane crash case. The plane was going to crash, but the pilot prevented this from happening. Geach sees here a

changing future. But if one is averse to a changing future, by far the most natural thing to say about this case is simply that the plane would have crashed had the pilot not acted. However, it turns out that this counterfactual *does not* capture the fact that the pilot prevented the plane from crashing; prevention cannot be analyzed counterfactually. How then to explain away the appearance of a changing future? It isn't clear.

A problem for Geach's treatment of prevention?

Suppose prevention cannot be analyzed counterfactually. That would certainly make it more difficult to explain away the force of Geach's examples. However, the mere failure (if it is a failure) of the counterfactual account does not by itself vindicate Geach's account of prevention. Geach's account may have problems of its own. Consider this case.²¹ Suppose Jones is working on the uppermost levels of a skyscraper when he loses his balance and falls. Thankfully, he is caught by a safety net, which had been in place all along, and thus does not fall to his death. In this case, it is natural to say that the safety net prevented his death. However, it does not seem appropriate in this case to say that Jones was going to fall to his death. He was never going to, precisely because the net was always there – the net was always going to prevent his fall. In this case, then, something prevented Jones from falling to his death, even though this was never going to happen. We thus seemingly have a counterexample to Geach's account of prevention.

What should the Geachian say in response to this example? I think the Geachian should argue that this case is not an instance of the phenomenon the analysis of which is currently at stake. The Geachian should say that what we are trying to analyze is what it is for one event to prevent another. But in this case, it is notable that it is the *net* that is said to have prevented Jones' fall to his death. And the net is not an event. Of course, one could attempt to translate this case into the parlance of events – perhaps the event of *the net's being there* prevented Jones' fall. But this is at best a gerrymandered event, and thus it is open to the Geachian to argue that the case is not an instance of the phenomenon in question.

But the Geachian can say more – much more. Suppose that workers on this particular building regularly fall and are caught by the net. Suppose, in fact, that they treat the net as just another feature of the building itself, which they perhaps jump on when they wish to quickly

²¹ Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this case.

descend a few levels of the structure, and as it happens Jones merely slipped just prior to when he was about to jump in any case. It would then seem like the net prevents Jones' death in precisely the same manner in which the *floor* he is standing on prevents his death. For without the floor, of course, Jones would fall to his death. (Jumping on the net is, so the thought goes, just like stepping on the floor.) Of course, once we see prevention here, we'll see it *everywhere*. The couch I am sitting on prevents me from falling to the ground. The pillow supporting my laptop prevents it from falling onto my lap. And so on.

And if one claims that these cases are cases of the same sort of phenomenon Geach sought to analyze – that of one event preventing another – then the explosion problem not only returns, but returns with a vengeance. For it will turn out that (seemingly) an infinite number of events are now preventing my death. Which events? Well, for starters, *the oxygen in the room's being there*, since without that oxygen, I would asphyxiate and die. Or suppose we have yet another intrepid reporter, this time at the New York Times. And suppose he pens the following headline: 'Events in New York today prevent the deaths of millions'. What drama unfolded today in New York? Why, the braces of the skyscrapers in the city being there! Such a result is, of course, absurd. One could admit that the braces prevent the collapse of the buildings, but deny that any events do so. But I do not see how this result can be avoided if one allows *the net's being there* to be an event that prevented Jones' death. In sum, then, the Geachian may argue that an analysis of one event's preventing another is something worth having, and contend that cases of the sort in question pose no threat to Geach's analysis of this phenomenon.²²

²² More generally, of course, the Geachian should (I say) contend that in those cases in which it *is* correct to say that one (non-gerrymandered) event prevented another, it will also be the case that the prevented event was going to happen. However, I hesitate to tie the success of Geachianism too closely to Geach's claim that what is prevented is always what was going to happen. What would it mean for Geachianism if this case (or some other) were a counterexample to this claim? Recall the initial challenge: that all that was true prior to the pilot's action was that the plane was going to crash unless prevented from crashing. Again, here Geach says: but what is prevented just is what was going to happen. But this reply is not open to Geach if there are counterexamples to this thesis. And if so, then Geachianism certainly loses some strength; part of its strength comes from the availability of this Geachian reply and its forcing the objector to take up the seriously problematic counterfactual account of prevention. So I would recommend to any Geachian a stalwart defense of Geach's account of prevention. However, a Geachian *could* simply insist that even if one could maintain that only the mere conditional was true, there is no ultimately compelling reason to adopt this thesis. That is, perhaps someone will say that all that was true was that the plane was going to crash unless prevented from crashing. However, the Geachian may simply have the firm intuition that this *isn't* all that was true: it was also true that the plane was going to crash. If so, he needn't rely on the reply that what is prevented just is what was going to happen (though, again, this claim would certainly help his case). And thus he needn't

So let us recap. We began with a challenge to the Geachian: that all that was true, prior to the pilot's action, was *not* that the plane was going to crash, but that it was going to unless the pilot prevented it. Here, however, Geach complains that what is prevented *just is* what was going to happen, and thus that this way of explaining away the appearance of a changing future fails. Kvanvig objects that we can understand prevention counterfactually: we can understand the claim that the plane was going to crash but that the pilot prevented it (roughly) as the claim that it would have crashed had he not acted.²³ But I raised what I think are serious problems for the counterfactual account, problems the diagnosis of which point towards Geachianism. In sum, then, I do not think Kvanvig's objection decisively refutes Geach's view.

Kvanvig on predictions

But Kvanvig has another criticism of Geach's view, which he nicely puts as follows:

Before Johnny's operation, Geach correctly notes that it was right to say 'Johnny is going to bleed to death'. However, what is not clear is that the statement *Johnny is going to bleed to death* is true before the operation. From the perspective of the observers, it appeared true and hence it was proper to claim to be true; but something can be proper to claim even though untrue. In this case we can appreciate the difference by noting that it would be appropriate for the observers to note, after the operation, that their earlier claim was false.²⁴

By way of response, we first ought to note that Geach's view need not have it that *every time* something appears to us as if it is going to happen, it is true that it *is* going to happen. Thus, it could very well be that (despite appearances) Johnny was not going to bleed to death all along, and thus it would be appropriate for the observers to note after the operation that their earlier claim was false. Despite what Geach may intimate, his examples are best thought of as what is *in principle possible*, and not as examples of how things always are.

defend this claim against (putative) counterexamples. In short, he simply needs the claim that prevention *sometimes* changes the future, not that it always does.

²³ Note: the Geachian's claim is not (or needn't be) the claim that this counterfactual is not *true*, but that it does not account for the case being one of prevention.

²⁴ Kvanvig 1986: 7.

But suppose this is a case in which it is indeed taken to be true that Johnny was going to bleed to death.²⁵ Then the response to Kvanvig must be hard-line. In this case, it is not appropriate for the observers to note after the operation that their earlier claim was false. Rather, it is appropriate for them to be thankful that the future changed. Suppose Rob unexpectedly loses his job. Should he conclude that he was going to lose it all along – that it was true two weeks ago, when he was working on his crucial project, that he was going to lose it? Of course not, says the Geachian. Perhaps he *was* going to keep it, but disaster struck his project. In the present case, should we conclude from the fact that Johnny has not bled to death that he never was going to? Again, of course not.²⁶

It is well known that views that deny that future contingents are true face the problem of accounting for the practice of retroactively predicating truth to predictions. This is Kvanvig's criticism; since Johnny has not in fact bled to death, it follows that it would have been true to say before the operation that he would not, and consequently that it was false that he would.²⁷ It must be admitted, I think, that this practice does constitute some evidence against such views. Geach's view faces the same problem. Various strategies of explaining away such retroactive predications of truth have been proposed, and here I simply note that such (or similar) strategies are likewise available to the Geachian.²⁸ In short, I do not believe this problem to be decisive against the

²⁵ These points raise questions for the Geachian. Just when is it true – and what, if anything, makes it true – that something is 'going to happen'? This is an extremely difficult question, and I do not have the space to adequately address it. I note only that all those philosophers who have commented on Geach's view have attributed to him – and not for no good textual reason – the view that X is going to happen iff there is some appropriate present tendency towards X's happening. While such a view is an option for the Geachian, it is not the only one: the Geachian can maintain that what is going to happen is simply brute – that what, if anything, makes it true that X is going to happen is the fact that it is going to. Ironically, it seems plain to me that the only theorists in this debate who can mount a principled objection to this claim are other open theists – open futurists who claim that such truths must be grounded in determinative causal tendencies. These points deserve further elaboration, like others in this paper, but I must set them aside.

²⁶ Perhaps some will complain that I am cheating here by framing the issue in terms of what *was going to* happen rather than in terms of what *would* happen. For some may say that it is more counterintuitive to suppose that something *would* happen but later does not than it is to suppose that something *was going to* happen but later does not. Well, perhaps I am indeed cheating here. However, at this stage of the dialectic, I believe the Geachian is entitled to the equivalence of *X is going to happen* with *X will happen*. Perhaps these expressions mean different things or have different truth conditions. If so, then perhaps this raises a problem for the Geachian, or makes the present problem more difficult. But I do not see that it is dialectically infelicitous to rely on this equivalence in the current defense of the view.

²⁷ For another (later) statement of this objection, see Fredosso 1988: 71-72.

²⁸ See, e.g. Rhoda 2006. Note: I am not claiming that the problem Kvanvig has raised for Geach is entirely isomorphic to the similar problem facing open future open theists. For on Geach's view, from the fact that X has not happened, we cannot conclude that it was never going to – 'X will happen' might have been true at

Geachian. Thus, while Kvanvig's criticism of Geach's proposal does point out a legitimate problem for his approach, Geachianism still (I claim) emerges as a theoretical contender.

Smart and Plantinga on the impossibility of changing the future

Besides the logic of prevention, there is at least one other argumentative strategy one may use to reach Geach's conclusions, a strategy recently pursued by Mark Hinchliff.²⁹ According to Hinchliff, it is commonplace and intuitive that we cannot change the past, but that we can change the future. It is a virtue of a theory if it can preserve this asymmetry. But (arguably) only on Geach's view can we genuinely change the future.

But it is here that we encounter incredulous dismissals of a changing future by J.J.C. Smart and Alvin Plantinga.³⁰ Here is Smart:

It makes no more sense to talk of changing the future than it does of changing the past. Suppose that I decide to change the future, by having coffee for breakfast tomorrow instead of my usual tea. Have I changed the future? No. For coffee for breakfast *was* the future. . . [T]he fact that our present actions determine the future would be most misleadingly expressed or described by saying that we can change the future. A man can change his trousers, his club, or his job. . . . But one thing he cannot change is the future, since whatever he brings about *is* the future, and nothing else is, or ever was.³¹

Not surprisingly, Geach regards Smart's statements here as mere assertion. After giving us Smart's quote, Geach immediately says,

some time in the past. Not so for open futurists. Still, *both* maintain that from the fact that X *has* happened, we cannot conclude that it was always going to. However, it is not clear that this difference makes the prediction problem any harder for the Geachian than it is for the open futurist; at any rate, I set this issue aside.

²⁹ As far as I know, Hinchliff is the only contemporary philosopher who defends Geach's position. Hinchliff defended the view in a talk given at the University of California, Riverside in the fall of 2007. Indeed, I owe it to Hinchliff for bringing Geach's view to my attention. A defense of the Geachian position has not yet appeared in Hinchliff's published work.

³⁰ To be clear, neither Smart nor Plantinga are explicitly addressing *Geach* in these passages.

³¹ Geach 1977: 52.

‘Or ever was’, indeed! If A is bringing something about, no doubt that is what *is now* going to happen; but what has Smart done to show that it *always was* going to happen, even before A’s action? Nothing; he has merely asserted it.³²

Plantinga says even less than Smart. Can someone, say Paul, change the future? Says Plantinga:

To alter the future, Paul must do something like this: he must perform some action *A* at a time *t* before 9:21 such that prior to *t* it is true that Paul will walk out at 9:21, but after *t* (after he performs *A*) false that he will.

This is, of course, precisely what Geach believes can happen. But Plantinga says, ‘neither Paul nor anyone—not even God—can do something like that. So the future is no more alterable than the past’.³³ The Geachian diagnosis is again clear: this is mere assertion.

In Smart’s case, the fundamental disagreement clearly arises from the fact that Smart is a *reductionist* about tense or a so-called *de-tenser*.³⁴ Such a view is plainly at odds with Geach’s. According to the reductionist, all tensed statements are to be analyzed in purely *tenseless* terms; tense is not a fundamental feature of reality. On such a view, propositions have their truth values *eternally*, so it is impossible for a proposition to have one truth value at one time and a different one at another; in fact, propositions are not true at times at all, but simply *true*. Such a view is closely related to the so-called B-theory of time. According to the B-theory, there is no objective present or ‘now’. Events are not objectively past, present, or future, but are merely earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than one’s vantage point. And events have their B-series order *eternally* – if X is ever earlier than Y, then X is *always* earlier than Y.

Geach, however, is working with a rival conception of time and tense.³⁵ Unlike Smart’s, Geach’s is a *tensed* theory of time – he ‘takes tense seriously’, as it is sometimes said. On this view, tensed features of our statements are not reducible to, and cannot be understood in terms of, tenseless statements. Propositions are true *at times* and can change truth values over time. The tensed view is closely related to the A-theory of time. On the A-theory, there *is* an objective present,

³² Geach 1977: 52.

³³ Plantinga 1986, reprinted in Fischer 1989:189. I thank Mark Hinchliff for bringing this passage to my attention.

³⁴ See Smart 1964.

³⁵ See, e.g., Geach’s important and influential 1965 essay, ‘Some Problems about Time’.

and events have irreducibly tensed properties of being past, present, or future. To be sure, a tensed theory of time does not straightforwardly *entail* Geach's position. But it is important to see whether objections to Geach's view are in fact objections to the tensed theory of time more generally, which has many able defenders, including, of course, Geach himself.³⁶

So much for Smart and Plantinga on changing the future. But one last point. On Geach's view, even though something *will* happen – *actually* will happen – it can very well fail to happen. Perhaps you think this is a strange, counterintuitive result. If it really is true that something is going to happen, how could it fail to? If this has been your reaction to Geach's view, then I must warn you that you may be in danger of becoming an open futurist. For it is clearly the central thesis of open future views – and logical fatalism – that if something will happen in the future, it *cannot* later fail to happen. If it will happen, then it is inevitable. Some of Geach's in-house rivals are welcome to feel incredulity at this feature of Geach's view. Those who do not wish to enter the fold are not.³⁷

This is, I believe, an important issue. Indeed, commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, one friend (and a very good philosopher!), himself certainly no friend to open future views, fell hard for the 'trap' I had wanted to set up above. That is, he expressed wholehearted agreement that the relevant claim – that what will happen can fail to happen – is a 'strange, counterintuitive result'. But moments later he noticed where that had led him: away from Geach, but now into the arms – or the jaws – of the fatalist. Of course, this lone anecdote hardly *establishes* anything. But I believe it reveals something important. Geach presents us with a view on which what will happen might not. Open futurists (and fatalists) have an easy time criticizing this view. Others, however, must tread carefully. They must claim that what is objectionable about Geach's view is his claim that what will happen might – well, what? Not *might not*. Perhaps *might later be such that it won't*. But I think it is implausible to suppose that intuition discriminates so finely between these claims; in the case of my friend, it clearly did not – at least initially. That is, I claim that if you find the idea of a changing

³⁶ There are important related issues here regarding the *ontology* of time that deserve mention. Eternalism is the view that past, present, and future objects all equally exist. Geachianism would seem plainly to require non-eternalism; surely, that is, we are not to imagine that when the pilot prevents the crash, he brings it about that the concrete mangled ruins of a (future) plane pop out of existence. As Geach says (somewhat cryptically), 'future-land is a region of fairytale'. (1977: 53) A Geachian's non-eternalist options are *presentism*, which holds that only *present* objects exist, and the *growing-block theory*, which holds that both past and present (but no future) objects exist.

³⁷ At any rate, those who maintain that alternative possibilities (i.e. that we 'can do otherwise') are required for freedom (and that we are indeed free) cannot balk at the notion that something that *will* happen *can* fail to happen, unless he or she is an open futurist, i.e. unless he or she denies that there *are* truths about what we will freely do.

future counterintuitive, it may very well be because (deep down, in the fatalist recesses within us all) you find the claim that what will happen nevertheless might not counterintuitive as well.³⁸ If so, then we have some ironic results: in expressing what is wrong with one version of open theism, one expresses what is right about another. No doubt many would resist this claim, and maintain that we can perfectly well see that Geach's view is wrong, but not because we do not like his result that what will happen might not happen. I'm skeptical. But I here merely register my skepticism.³⁹

This must end our discussion of Geach's view of the mutability of the future, which, needless to say, raises many fascinating questions which we cannot address here.⁴⁰ A new issue now arises. How does Geach's view bear on the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom? And how does the application of the view to this issue relate to other versions of open theism? To answer these questions, we first need to investigate the argument to which open theism has largely been a reaction. In the minds of most, especially those coming at this topic from a philosophical angle, open theism is primarily a particular sort of response to the argument for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, an argument which was crystallized by Nelson Pike in his 1965 paper, 'Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action'. I thus turn to a brief discussion of this argument, after which we will see how Geach's view opens up an interesting new response to it.

Geach and the (in?)compatibility of foreknowledge and freedom

³⁸ Perhaps the Ockhamist would wish to claim that what is objectionable about Geach's view is that what will happen *can epistemically* still fail to happen, though not its claim that what will happen *can causally* still fail to happen. Again, however, while this may be the Ockhamist's official position, I am skeptical that intuition clearly distinguishes between these two senses of 'can' at the level of an initial reaction to Geach's position. Is it really *just* the claim that what will happen can *epistemically* fail to happen that is (allegedly) counterintuitive about Geach's proposal? Again, I simply note that philosophers unsympathetic to Geach's view *and* to fatalism ought to tread carefully.

³⁹ Note: there is arguably no contradiction in saying, as would Plantinga and other Ockhamists, both that the future cannot change *and* that what will happen can fail to happen. For Ockhamists, while we cannot change the future, we *can* so act that the actual future *wouldn't have been* the future. In that sense what will happen *can* fail to happen. But the future cannot change: nothing that will happen can become such that it will not.

⁴⁰ Though *Providence and Evil* contains the most complete statement of his view, the view is also articulated in Geach 1973. Moreover, in an essay in his 1998 book, *Truth and Hope*, Geach reiterated his view, saying he is 'sharply opposed to a view widespread in our day: that... 'changing the future' is a self-contradictory concept: 'It was going to happen but didn't happen' is on this view a violently improper use of language and in no circumstances can be literally true'. See p. 88 of Ch. 6, 'Prophecy'.

Pike's 1965 paper provoked a veritable avalanche of work on the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. According to Pike, one can argue from certain plausible premises together with the thesis that God exists to the conclusion that no human action is free (in the sense requiring the ability to do otherwise). Here, it is worth simply replicating Pike's argument in full:

1. "God existed at t_1 " entails "If Jones did X at t_2 , God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 ."
2. "God believes X " entails "' X ' is true."
3. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something having a description that is logically contradictory.
4. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that someone who held a certain belief at a time prior to the time in question did not hold that belief at the time prior to the time in question.
5. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that a person who existed at an earlier time did not exist at that earlier time.
6. If God existed at t_1 and if God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 , then if it was within Jones's power at t_2 to refrain from doing X , then (1) it was within Jones's power at t_2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at t_1 , or (2) it was within Jones's power at t_2 to do something which would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief He held at t_1 , or (3) it was within Jones's power at t_2 to do something that would have brought it about that any person who believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief and thus was not God--that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at t_1) did not exist at t_1 .
7. Alternative 1 in the consequent of item 6 is false. (from 2 and 3)
8. Alternative 2 in the consequent of item 6 is false. (from 4)
9. Alternative 3 in the consequent of item 6 is false. (from 5)
10. Therefore, if God existed at t_1 and if God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 , then it was not within Jones's power at t_2 to refrain from doing X . (from 6 through 9).
11. Therefore, if God existed at t_1 , and if Jones did X at t_2 , it was not within Jones's power at t_2 to refrain from doing X . (from 1 and 10)⁴¹

⁴¹ Pike, reprinted in Fischer 1989: 63.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail all the objections philosophers have had with Pike's argument and all the sorts of replies it has provoked. Notably, however, perhaps the most common reply has been the so-called 'Ockhamist solution' advocated by (amongst others) Marilyn Adams and Alvin Plantinga.⁴² The Ockhamist denies premise (4) of Pike's argument on grounds that God's beliefs are 'temporally relational' or 'soft' facts, and thus not subject to the (tacit) principle of the fixity of the past underlying (4).⁴³ That is, by the Ockhamist's lights, we can sometimes so act that God would not have believed what he actually did believe.

The open theist does not take this route. The open theist's response to Pike's argument is to deny (1), the thesis that it follows from Jones' doing X at t_2 that God believed (and hence knew) at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 . Both versions of open theism discussed in Rhoda's analysis make this reply salient. On one version, it was not *true* at t_1 that Jones would freely do X at t_2 , and on the other, it was logically impossible (for reasons Pike's argument – setting aside certain niceties – itself brings out) for God to believe at t_1 that Jones would freely do X at t_2 . But now we can see how Geach's view also makes possible a denial of (1). Recall Geach's rhetorical question:

But if something did happen, doesn't this show it was after all going to happen? Certainly; but not that it *always* was going to happen.

In other words, Geach denies the inference from X's happening at t_2 to its being true at all earlier times that X would happen at t_2 . Thus, it does not *follow* from Jones' doing X at t_2 that it was true at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 . At t_1 , it may have been true that Jones was going to do $\sim X$ at t_2 rather than X, and in the time between t_1 and t_2 prevented what was going to happen (his refraining from X-ing at t_2) and did X at t_2 instead. Moreover, the Geachian may plainly maintain that if it was not true at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 , then God did not believe at t_1 that he would do X at t_2 , contrary to Pike's first premise.⁴⁴

⁴² See Adams and Plantinga in Fischer 1989.

⁴³ Note: the Ockhamist does not claim that *all* soft facts fail to be fixed; just those involving our free decisions.

⁴⁴ Geach nowhere says this explicitly, which is somewhat disconcerting, since this is the plain consequence of the account of the mutability of the future he offers. And Geach emphasizes that God must believe all and only what is true.

On Geach's analysis, it could very well be that at $t1$ God believes of Jones that he will do X at $t10$, but at $t7$ something happens (perhaps a decision of Jones himself) so as to prevent Jones from doing X at $t10$, with the result that Jones does not do X at $t10$, contrary to what at $t1$ God believed he would do. Someone in the grips of a view opposed to Geach's would immediately infer from this result that God was *mistaken* at $t1$ in his belief about Jones doing X at $t10$. But such an inference would be the real mistake, according to the Geachian. Rather, if God believes at $t1$ that Jones is going to do X at $t10$, then at $t1$ it of course really is the case that Jones is going to do X at $t10$; God is making no mistake. Nevertheless, it is consistent with its being true at $t1$ that Jones will do X at $t10$ that at $t7$ it becomes false that Jones will do X at $t10$. In this case, while God begins believing at $t7$ that Jones will not do X at $t10$, he has not always believed this; previously, he believed (correctly) that Jones would do X at $t10$, but adjusted his beliefs about what would happen to accommodate the fact that what was going to happen has been prevented from happening, and a new thing now will happen. Whether this picture of God's beliefs is plausible is an open question, but there is clearly no basis for a charge that God would be making mistakes.

But Geach's view opens up another way of reply to Pike's argument that is somewhat more complicated than a simple denial of (1). Geach may deny that the trichotomy in (6) is exhaustive.⁴⁵ On Geach's view, Jones' power to refrain from doing X at $t2$ (despite God's belief at $t1$ that he would do X at $t2$) need not be the power so to act that God either would have held a different belief at $t1$, a false belief at $t1$, or would not have existed at $t1$. Rather, Jones' power could simply be the power so to act that though God believed at $t1$ that Jones would do X at $t2$, what God believed would happen fails to happen. In other words, by preventing what was going to be (as of $t1$) from coming to pass, Jones brings it about that what God believed would happen was prevented from happening. Again, it is tempting here to insist that this power of Jones' is the power to bring it about that God was mistaken, but the Geachian denies this. Moreover, Jones' power is *not* the counterfactual control over the past invoked by Ockhamists that open theists have traditionally found problematic. Jones *does not* have the power so to act that God's beliefs would have been different, as the Ockhamist claims. Rather, he has the power so to act that God's (present) beliefs *become* different.

⁴⁵ I owe this point to Neal Tognazzini.

Geachianism and open theism

As we just saw, given Geach's view, one may maintain that Jones has the power to refrain from doing X at t_2 (despite God's belief at t_1) without invoking any problematic power over the past. Given this result, it is worth briefly pausing to consider how this result squares with open theism commonly conceived. Suppose we are at t_{20} , a time later than t_{10} . Using the past-tense construction to avoid certain difficulties about a tenseless 'happens' or 'does', notice that Geach's view maintains that

(A) God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_{10}

does not entail that

(B) Jones did X at t_{10} .⁴⁶

Now, if it does not follow from God's belief at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_{10} that (looking backwards) Jones *did* X at t_{10} , it will be hard to see how it could follow from God's belief that Jones would do X at t_{10} that Jones *could not have done otherwise* than X at t_{10} . Given Geach's views about future contingents, it will be impossible to generate an argument for the incompatibility of mere divine foreknowledge and human freedom.⁴⁷ Even if God knew that Jones would do X at t_{10} , Jones could have (*ceteris paribus*) acted so as to prevent its being the case that he did X at t_{10} – again, even if he did X at t_{10} and God knew he would.

Given this result, we can notice that Geachianism is in an important respect significantly different than others versions of open theism. After all, while all open theists deny (1) of Pike's argument, the claim that it follows from Jones' doing X at t_2 that God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 , open theists are typically taken to maintain that if God *really did* believe of Jones

⁴⁶ The reason for the past-tensed construction is the following. The Geachian need not – and should not – maintain that 'Jones will do X at t_{10} ' does not entail 'Jones (tenselessly) does X at t_{10} '. Rather, the Geachian should maintain that such an entailment holds, but that the tenseless 'does' must itself be analyzed in terms of tensed propositions, i.e. that 'Jones does X at t_{10} ' is true iff 'Jones has done X at t_{10} , is doing X at t_{10} , or will do X at t_{10} ' is true. Clearly, then, if 'Jones will do X at t_{10} ' is true, so is 'Jones does X at t_{10} ', since the third disjunct of the analysis will be true. More generally, the Geachian plainly ought to deny that there is some immutable, tenseless fact about what 'happens' at times.

⁴⁷ Of course, this is hardly a cost of the view, and many would find such a result to speak in its favor.

that he would do X at t_2 , then of course it would follow that Jones cannot refrain from doing X at t_2 . In other words, the traditional motivation for open theism has been the thought that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are incompatible, with the consequence that we must deny that God has foreknowledge of future free actions. Though Geach's view entails a denial of (1), it also has the consequence that mere divine foreknowledge is consistent with human freedom.

Some might take this fact to call into question the claim that Geachianism is a version of open theism. Of course, I have no decisive argument against the view that the incompatibility thesis is essential to open theism. And anyway, so long as we are clear about how we use our terms, what we call the relevant views is not of ultimate concern. However, it strikes me that Geachianism *is* a version of the view, and that what makes it so is its denial of premise (1) of Pike's argument: from Jones' doing X at t_2 , it follows that at t_1 God believed he would. I submit that open theists must deny this claim. More generally, I submit that you are an open theist if and only if you maintain Rhoda's first two criteria (theism and indeterminism), together with the following:

(OT) Some things happen and have happened which God has not always known would happen.

Notice that this thesis is directed towards the *present* and the *past*, and not the future. This makes sense, since the disagreements which mark different versions of open theism are disagreements about the nature of the *future*.

So let us come full circle and reconsider Rhoda's characterization of 'generic open theism'. Recall that Rhoda maintained that open theists must endorse the claim that there are some states of affairs such that God knows neither that they *will* nor *will not* happen. But we can see that the Geachian need not admit this. It is not essential to Geachianism that there are some things about which God must say, 'I do not believe that that is going to happen, and nor do I believe that it is not'. Admittedly, this would imply that God has in mind some unique, maximal blueprint of how the world will be. But how the world will be changes. The result is a denial of premise (1) of Pike's argument, and thus, I suggest, a version of open theism. So I suggest replacing Rhoda's analysis of 'generic open theism' with the one suggested above.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Of course, if the reader will permit me a sociological remark, I am not confident that the usage of the term 'open theism' in popular discourse will be sensitive to the variety of views open theists actually (or could

Geachianism and divine repentance texts

In the final two sections of this paper, I consider how Geachianism bears on two distinctively theological considerations historically relevant to open theism: so-called ‘divine repentance texts’ and the doctrine of providence. Consider this passage from Isaiah, which is, along with others like it, often cited by open theist theologians:

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, ‘This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.’

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ‘Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes’. And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ‘Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life’’. (38:1-5, New International Version)

According to open theologians, a straightforward reading of this and similar passages puts pressure on the traditional model of divine foreknowledge. After all, so the thought goes, if God eternally and infallibly knew that Hezekiah was not going to die, it would seem that God was being disingenuous when he told Hezekiah that he would.

Perhaps open theologians are right in seeing a problem for the traditional model here. What is remarkable, however, is that a straightforward reading of the passage – and that is what the

possibly) hold. In popular discourse, open theism is often simply the view that God lacks ‘comprehensive’ or ‘exhaustive’ foreknowledge. As Rhoda notes, such a characterization may be appropriate for views like Hasker’s, but it is not appropriate for those views that deny that future contingents are true. On that view, God *does* have comprehensive or exhaustive knowledge of everything that will be the case. Likewise on Geachianism.

theologians in question claim to be interested in – supports *Geachianism* rather than familiar models of open theism. For only on Geachianism can God’s statements to Hezekiah come out *true*. Hezekiah really *was* going to die, and God was *correct* in saying that he would not recover. But Hezekiah’s earnest prayer *prevented* what was going to happen, so that what was once true (that he would die) now becomes false. Indeed, a Geachian of a certain sort might say that just as such texts pose a stark problem for the traditional model (on account of putting a known falsehood in God’s mouth), they pose the very same problem for traditional open views. Traditional openness theologians must explain how God could have said that Hezekiah would die, even though this was (by their lights) not true. At any rate, a Geachian approach to such passages seems required if we really are to take them at face value and preserve the notion that God is no deceiver. I think it is remarkable that this fact has not been widely noticed. Perhaps I have just provided theologians of a certain inclination good reason to become Geachians.

Moreover, even if there is no good reason to want (let alone *require*) ‘straightforward’ readings of such texts (or even if one accords no even *prima facie* authority to such texts in the first place), the text in question still seems to help the Geachian. For what would be so problematic about reading the text in the straightforward way? It is not clearly *incoherent* or in any obvious sense *impossible* that the text could be representing things as they really are. Indeed, the text seems to be a perfect illustration of Geachianism in action. Of course, those in the grip of the traditional view would have to insist that God was merely teaching Hezekiah a lesson (or some such), and that he knew all along that his (God’s) message to Hezekiah would lead to Hezekiah’s earnest prayer and his ‘adding’ 15 years to Hezekiah’s life. But why is an explanation along these lines *required*? Why not rather say that Hezekiah (or God) changed the future?

Geachianism and providence

Perhaps the easiest way to consider how Geachianism might affect one’s theory of providence is to consider one at least *prima facie* difficulty a Geachian model of providence faces. It may seem as if Geachianism would imply that God cannot count on hardly *anything’s* happening in the future, and if so, this fact would seem to call into question God’s ability to providentially govern the world as required. After all, Geachianism has the result that God could know that X will happen, but that it (causally) could still fail to happen. Moreover, God would not have access to some immutable fact

about whether X ‘happens’ at the relevant time. Knowing that something will happen by itself provides no guarantees that it later will not.

Is this a severe problem for Geachianism? Not obviously. Geachianism would seem to call for a distinction between those things which *must* happen and those things which are merely *going to* happen. If God were wise, he would know to build his plans – at any rate, the really important ones – only on the foundation of those things which *must* happen. Whereas open future open theists identify what *will* happen with what *must* happen, Geach would deny this. Nonetheless, a Geachian could agree that there are some things which are now determined, and could maintain that these are those things which must happen. Just as on open future open views God would be unwise to base some crucial plan on what merely will *probably* be, so the Geachian could insist that God would be unwise to base some crucial plan on merely what will be. For that could always change. At any rate, what is clear is that Geach’s God will be in the exact same providential situation as traditional open views suggest. So if traditional open views have an adequate account of providence, so does Geachianism.

Moreover, it is at this point that I believe Geachianism is able to shine considerable light on controversial issues concerning the providential usefulness (or lack thereof) of so-called ‘simple foreknowledge’. As I remarked above, the Geachian God could know that X will happen, but it also be true that X could (causally) still fail to happen. Of course, Ockhamists too must accept this thesis, but the distinctions here are obvious: the Ockhamist God would still know that X *does unchangeably* happen, even if it causally might not. This knowledge might seem to give the Ockhamist God a providential advantage over the Geachian God (or any God lacking such knowledge). But William Hasker has vigorously – and, in my judgment, correctly – argued that this knowledge is in fact providentially *useless* to God.⁴⁹ For on the Ockhamist view, facts about what unchangeably happens at times are facts logically and explanatorily *posterior* to God’s deliberations (or other providential activities). Thus, God cannot *use* knowledge of what (unchangeably) happens as data in deciding what the future is to be like; by that (logical) time, the future is already unchangeably fixed.

Suppose, as I believe to be the case, that Hasker is right in holding that (given Ockhamist suppositions) knowledge of what will be is providentially useless to God. This would seem to be a cost for Ockhamism. For it is counterintuitive to suppose that knowledge of what will be would be useless in controlling the world as one sees fit. Plausibly, however, only Geachianism can properly

⁴⁹ See Hasker 1989.

accommodate this intuition. That is, on Geachianism, knowledge of what will be is *clearly* providentially advantageous: by knowing what will happen, one is thereby in much better position to prevent it should one wish to do so. Or, if something one *does* want to happen (at the moment) *will not* happen, then one can then act (or try to act) so as to bring it about that it will. Common sense has it that total knowledge of what is going to happen would be a great help to someone wishing to control the future. Traditional models of foreknowledge cannot accommodate this result. Geachianism can. Though these points clearly deserve further elaboration, I believe they constitute an independent argument for Geachianism.⁵⁰

Conclusion: Advantage to the Geachian?

Here ends my application of Geach's view to the issues of divine foreknowledge and providence. The view that emerges is unique, and it is worth pausing to consider whether it has distinctive advantages over its more familiar rivals. It does. First, consider open future versions of open theism. One such version denies bivalence. This has been seen to be a severe cost for the view. Geachianism requires no rejection of bivalence. The other such version maintains that *will* and *will not* are not contradictories, so that 'Jones will swim tomorrow, or Jones will not swim tomorrow' is not an instance of $p \vee \sim p$. This has struck many as dubious, and at any rate is not the view of the overwhelming majority. Geachianism does not deny that *will* and *will not* are contradictories. Next, consider Hasker's limited foreknowledge version of open theism, the version which maintains that there are truths about the future which God does not know. Hasker and company must explain how it is that God can still be omniscient, despite not knowing these truths. The Geachian faces no

⁵⁰ Other open theists – both of the open future and limited foreknowledge variety – might complain that their views can also properly accommodate the providential usefulness of knowing what will be. On such views, God will know that something will be as a result of seeing that it is causally determined. Thus, so long as the future is to some extent causally open, God would be able to use his knowledge of these facts to casually affect other (undetermined) aspects of the future, thereby giving it a more determinate shape. But it is unclear whether this account can truly capture the relevant intuitions. For it seems as if (on this account) what is useful to God is not knowledge of what will be *qua* knowledge of what will be, but knowledge of the causal structure of the world and what it makes inevitable. In other words, that what is causally determined also *will be* is *epiphenomenal* in the relevant sense. For the Geachian, knowing what will be *qua* knowing what will be is by itself useful. At any rate, if other open theists *can* properly accommodate the providential usefulness of such knowledge, then the above claims support merely the *disjunction* of Geachianism and other open views.

such problem. These are the most familiar problems for these versions of open theism. Geachianism avoids them all.

Moreover, looking beyond its advantages over other open views, many have thought the Ockhamist's counterfactual control over the past to be problematic. Not a problem for the Geachian. Nor does the Geachian have any problems arising from God's supposed atemporality. There are no counterfactuals of freedom in need of grounds. One has a straightforward account of the providential usefulness of knowing what will happen. All this can be bought by maintaining that the future is mutable. But what is the cost? As Kvanvig's critique showed, one has the problem of accounting for retroactive predications of truth to predictions. But this cost does not strike me as decisive against open views of the future. Perhaps there are other problems for the Geachian, but they must fall outside the scope of this paper.

In this paper, I have tried to develop Geach's view on future contingents and apply it to the problems of divine foreknowledge, providence, and human freedom. Geach's work is provocative, but he did not systematically explain how his views are related to and are different from rival views about time, tense, foreknowledge, and freedom. I have sought to do so here, albeit in a preliminary way. I do not claim to have considered – let alone explored – all the various problems that might face the Geachian. However, I do claim that philosophers of religion should be aware of Geach's view as a theoretical possibility in these debates. Geach's case from the logic of prevention is stronger than the arguments of *Providence and Evil* might make it seem. Kvanvig's criticisms are not decisive. The quick dismissals of Smart and Plantinga are too quick. And Geachianism has certain attractive advantages over its rivals. The dialectical terrain about such matters very rarely sees a genuinely new position emerge. Perhaps the dialectic was going to proceed as it has been for some time to come. If so, then in a bold Geachian spirit, I hope to have changed the future.⁵¹

⁵¹ For helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, I wish to thank William Hasker, Eleonore Stump, Alan Rhoda, Kevin Timpe, Michael Nelson, Justin McBrayer, Andrew Moon, Kenneth Boyce, and my colleagues and fellow members of the agency reading group at the University of California, Riverside, Justin Coates, Garrett Pendergraft, Chris Franklin, and especially Philip Swenson and Neal Tognazzini, both of whom were invaluable discussion partners while writing this paper. I am indebted to Mark Hinchliff both for bringing the view to my attention and for several helpful conversations about these topics. Most of all, I owe deep thanks to John Martin Fischer for his constant support and encouragement of this project and for valuable comments on numerous drafts of the paper.

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