

Soft Facts and Harsh Realities: Reply to William Craig

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JOHN MARTIN FISCHER

SOFT FACTS AND HARSH REALITIES:
REPLY TO WILLIAM CRAIG

(I). In a number of papers I have sought to discuss and cast some doubt on a certain strategy of response to an argument that purports to show that God's foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom.¹ This argument proceeds from the alleged 'fixity of the past' to the conclusion that God's foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom.² William Lane Craig has (rather vigorously) criticized my approach to these issues.³ Here I should like to respond to some of Craig's claims. My goal is to attempt to achieve a clearer, more penetrating view of some of the issues pertaining to the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human freedom. The focus here will be on a strategy of response to the incompatibilist's argument which is associated with William of Ockham.

William of Ockham conceded that God has beliefs in the past about one's future free actions. But Ockham distinguished between two kinds of past facts. One kind of past fact is genuinely and solely about the past; we might call this kind of fact a 'hard' fact about the past. Another kind of fact is not both genuinely and solely about the past; such a fact is a 'soft' fact about the past. The key claim of Ockham is that soft facts about the past do not carry the necessity that attends hard facts about the past. Further, Ockham's view is that certain facts about God are soft facts and thus that they are not necessary in virtue of being about the past. (They may of course be necessary in virtue of *other* considerations.)⁴ In my paper, 'Ockhamism', I distinguished 'Belief-Ockhamism' and 'Existence-Ockhamism'. A Belief-Ockhamist holds that humans are free in some situations so to act that God would not have held a belief He actually held. An Existence-Ockhamist holds that humans are free in some situations so to act that the individual who was

¹ John Martin Fischer, 'Freedom and Foreknowledge', *Philosophical Review*, xcii (1983), 69-79; John Martin Fischer, 'Ockhamism', *Philosophical Review*, xciv (1985), 81-100; John Martin Fischer, 'Pike's Ockhamism', *Analysis*, xlvi (1986), 57-63; John Martin Fischer, 'Hard-Type Soft Facts', *Philosophical Review*, xcvi (1986), 591-601; and John Martin Fischer, 'Snapshot Ockhamism', *Philosophical Perspectives*, forthcoming 1991.

² For a contemporary development of such an argument, see Nelson Pike, 'Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action', *Philosophical Review*, lxxiv (1965), 27-46. This paper is reprinted along with a selection of papers that discuss the argument and various strategies of response to it in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* ed. by John Martin Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

³ William Lane Craig, "'Nice Soft Facts': Fischer on Foreknowledge", *Religious Studies* xxv (1989).

⁴ See William of Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, trans. by Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), pp. 46-47. There is a good discussion of the relevant passage in Alvin Plantinga, 'On Ockham's way out', reprinted in Fischer, ed., pp. 178-215, esp. p. 190.

actually God would not have been God (either in virtue of not existing or simply not filling the role of God).

Graig objects to my use of ‘Ockhamism’ to denote the position in question.⁵ He says:

... although Fischer claims to be discussing various versions of ‘Ockhamism’, it is clear that most of the positions he attacks only remotely resemble Ockham’s views, thereby promoting misunderstanding... To be specific, the view that we can act in such a way that were we to do so, God would not have existed (or the person who is God would not have been God) – a view Fischer calls one version of Ockhamism – would have been vigorously repudiated by Ockham. It resembles his view only in employing a back-tracking counterfactual; but to call it therefore ‘Ockhamism’ is a distortion of his position.⁶

First, I am puzzled by Craig’s claim that ‘most of the positions he [Fischer] attacks only remotely resemble Ockham’s views’ (in virtue of being versions of so-called Existence-Ockhamism). This is odd, since I have spent most of my time discussing Belief-Ockhamism. Second, both of the views in question – Belief-Ockhamism and Existence-Ockhamism – claim that a certain fact about the past is not genuinely and solely about the past and thus does not carry the necessity of the past. That is, both views share Ockham’s general position that facts which only appear to be strictly about the past but are really also about the future do not carry the necessity of the past. Thus, both views can for some purposes be called ‘Ockhamist’ positions. For the above reason, even if Ockham would have repudiated what I have called ‘Existence-Ockhamism’, it is *not* the case (as Craig claims) that the *only* way in which Ockham’s view resembles what I have called Existence-Ockhamism is ‘in employing a back-tracking counterfactual’; the Existence-Ockhamist shares Ockham’s view that certain key facts about God are not strictly about the past and thus do not have the necessity of the past.

It is very important to understand the leading ideas behind incompatibilism and Ockhamism. (Henceforth I shall take ‘Ockhamism’ to denote Belief-Ockhamism.) The incompatibilist argues that facts which are genuinely and solely about the past are now ‘fixed’, i.e. out of our control. Further, he claims that God’s prior beliefs about our present behavior are just such facts. The Ockhamist *agrees* with the incompatibilist that facts which are strictly about the past are indeed now fixed and out of our control. But he claims that God’s prior beliefs are *not* in the class of such facts. It is useful to note that both the incompatibilist and the Ockhamist share the view that facts strictly about the past are currently fixed.

⁵ In a different paper from the one under consideration here, Craig says, ‘Recent translations of some of Ockham’s works into English have stimulated a renewed interest in his thought, and one frequently finds his name bandied about – often with little understanding – in current discussions of theological fatalism’ (William Lane Craig, ‘William Ockham On Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingency’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* LXIX (1988), 117.) In the footnote which accompanies this remark, Craig proceeds to elaborate: ‘Certainly the worst example I have found of contemporary misconstruals of Ockham emerges in the debate between Pike and Fischer over the viability of Ockhamism falsely so-called.’

⁶ Craig (1989), p. 235, note 2.

Before beginning my analysis of Craig's criticism of my discussion of Ockhamism, it might be worthwhile to pause to clarify my project. In the first sentence of Craig's paper, he says that I claim 'to have proved that even if God's past beliefs are "nice soft facts", still theological fatalism cannot be averted'.⁷ But I have claimed no such thing. I have never purported to have established theological fatalism (or incompatibilism). I have certainly claimed that incompatibilism has considerable plausibility. And I *have* argued *against* Ockhamism, which is one way of blocking the argument for incompatibilism. But in arguing against Ockhamism, one is not *eo ipso* arguing for incompatibilism, for there are other ways of seeking to block the incompatibilist's argument.⁸

(II). Now let us proceed to an examination of Craig's criticism of my treatment of Ockhamism. Craig claims that I have misunderstood the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' facts. He claims that this is (in part) due to my misunderstanding of the original intentions of Pike and Saunders in introducing this distinction.⁹ I construe a 'hard' fact as a fact which is temporally non-relational as regards the future; a hard fact about the past is genuinely and solely about the past, i.e. it is strictly about the past. Further, I construe a 'fixed' fact as a fact which is out of one's control; a fact *F* is fixed (relative to agent *A*) just in case there is no action which *A* can perform which is such that, were *A* to perform it, *F* would not obtain.¹⁰

Craig says:

Originally the distinction was meant to capture the difference between facts which would have been otherwise were some future event not to occur and facts which would have remained the same whether or not some future event were to occur. In other words, originally 'hardness' and 'fixity' were mutually entailing virtually synonymous terms. Unfortunately, Marilyn Adams misconstrued this original distinction by defining a hard fact as the fact expressed by a proposition which is not at least in part about the future.¹¹

But I believe that Craig is wrong about the original intentions of such writers as Pike and Saunders in introducing the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' facts; once this is seen, it emerges that Adams did not misconstrue this distinction, even if her *explication* of it is problematic.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁸ In 'Hard-Type Soft Facts' I say, 'Even if God's existence and God's belief are nice soft facts, they are soft facts with a residual hardness. These are the facts, hard as they may be to accept' (p. 601). Note that my claim is *not* that even if the above-mentioned facts are soft, theological fatalism cannot be averted. Rather, my claim here is that Ockhamism is internally problematic; the claim is that even the Ockhamist's soft facts have aspects or components which are 'hard' – genuinely and solely about the past. If this is so, Ockhamism is unacceptable; but there may (obviously) be *other* ways of controverting incompatibilism.

⁹ Craig (1989), pp. 236–7.

¹⁰ Craig complains that the account I have given of fixity renders the notion 'person-relative'. He says that this implies that 'a past event may be fixed for some persons but not for other, more powerful persons, which seems not at all to capture our intuitions concerning the fixity of the past' (Craig, p. 236, note 2). But to relativize fixity to persons need *not* entail that anyone can affect the past. The definition of fixity is supposed to apply quite *generally*, and not just to past facts, and thus it clearly *ought* to be person-relative. A constraint can then be applied to render it the case that all past facts are fixed for all persons.

¹¹ Craig (1989), pp. 236–7.

Here is what Nelson Pike says in introducing the distinction:

On the one hand, let us say that some facts about the past (for example, facts about Caesar's death) were 'fully accomplished', 'over-and-done-with' and so forth in the past (for example in 44 B.C.). These are sometimes called 'hard facts' about the past. The fact that Caesar died on the steps of the Senate is a fact of this sort. On the other hand, some facts about the past are not, relative to a given time, 'fully accomplished', 'over-and-done-with', and so forth at that time. The fact that Caesar died 2009 years before he wrote his paper was not a 'fully accomplished' fact about Caesar's death.¹²

It should be evident that my use of 'hard' and 'soft' matches rather closely Pike's original intentions. Clearly, a fact which is genuinely and solely about the past, i.e. which is strictly about the past, is precisely a fact which (in Pike's words) is 'fully accomplished and over-and-done-with'. Pike was pointing to the intuitive distinction between facts which are temporally nonrelational as regards the future and facts which are temporally relational as regards the future. And if this is indeed Pike's point, then Adams did *not* misconstrue his distinction: a fact which is 'fully accomplished and over-and-done-with' is precisely a fact which is 'not at least in part about the future' (in Adams' words).

In a rather remarkable passage, Craig says:

Fischer himself helped to expose the inadequacy of this definition [proposed by Adams according to which a fact is a hard fact insofar as it does not entail any contingent future facts] by showing its inability to deal with complex propositions such as

(1) Either Smith knew at t_1 that Jones would do x at t_2 or Jones believed at t_1 that Jones would do x at t_2 .

For (1) entails nothing about the future and so on Adams's definition expresses a hard fact. But suppose the second disjunct is false. Is it not then the case that (1) is soft, asks Fischer, since Jones could act so as to falsify the first disjunct and so render (1) false? Actually what Fischer's argument showed is not that (1) is soft, for it is clearly hard under Adams's definition, but rather that Jones could so act as to affect counterfactually a supposedly hard fact.¹³

But it should be apparent that I was starting with the clear intuitive idea that if the second disjunct is false, then (1) should be a soft – temporally relational as regards the future – fact about t_1 . (Note that the *basis* of this claim is *not* an intuition about the lack of fixity, but an uncontroversial intuition about temporal relationality.) I then pointed out that on Adams' criterion, it does not count as a soft fact, and thus that Adams' criterion is inadequate as it stands. I am mystified as to why Craig would think that I should have concluded that Jones could so act as to affect counterfactually a 'supposedly hard fact'. Why would this conclusion be illuminating, insofar as the fact in question is 'supposed' by a certain theory to be hard in the face

¹² Nelson Pike, 'Of God and Freedom: A Rejoinder', *Philosophical Review*, LXXV (1966), 370. This paper is in response to John Turk Saunders, 'Of God and Freedom', *Philosophical Review*, LXXV (1966), 219–25.

¹³ Craig, pp. 237.

of the clear and strong intuition (shared by both Ockhamists and their opponents) that this fact is *soft*? Why not conclude that the theory is wrong in supposing this to be hard fact? (I guess one could say, about Columbus, that he showed that one could sail around a supposedly flat world. But it is better to say that he showed the flat-world theory to be false.)

Craig later says, 'What Fischer ought to have done was to reject Adams' implicit distinction between hardness and fixity and to stick by his own intuitive understanding of a soft fact in his earlier piece, namely, that a soft fact is a fact *in virtue* of events which will occur in the future and therefore is not fixed.'¹⁴ Two points. First, I was here not attempting to give a *general explication* of the distinction between hard and soft facts, but to motivate what I called the 'Incompatibilist's Constraint' – a constraint limiting such a general explication. Second, I most definitely *did not* state (or otherwise imply) that soft facts are *eo ipso* not fixed. Craig has gratuitously appended to my claim about softness a claim about fixity. (Craig's footnote which accompanies his claim about my views refers to pp. 76–9 of my article, 'Freedom and Foreknowledge'; on these pages I find *no* claim that softness implies the lack of fixity.) I have always emphasized what I take to be an analytically crucial distinction between 'softness' – which pertains to temporal relationality as regards the future – and 'fixity' – which pertains to what an agent can control or affect.

Consider Craig's further claim, 'Any fact that is fixed is *ipso facto* a hard fact because it is not a fact in virtue of events which will occur in the future.'¹⁵ Again, the assimilation of hardness and fixity is conceptually pernicious. Consider a fact such as that it is true on Monday that the sun rises on Tuesday morning. This is a fixed fact on Monday – there is nothing anyone can do about it. But it is not a hard fact about Monday – it is temporally relational as regards the future. There can be soft facts which are nevertheless fixed. Also, some philosophers – compatibilists about *causal determinism* and human freedom – have argued that even hard facts about the past need not be fixed now. Thus, hardness and fixity are conceptually distinct, even if there are (or are merely alleged to be) connections between the different notions. I emphasize: it is both faithful to the traditional and contemporary discussion of such issues and conceptually most perspicuous to *distinguish* between considerations of temporal relationality (hardness *vs.* softness) and considerations of power (fixity).

Rather than as an account of the intention of Pike in introducing the distinction between hard and soft facts, perhaps we can look at Craig's suggestion as a possible *explication* of this distinction. Let us briefly consider this possibility. Craig's suggestion is that soft facts are facts 'which would have been otherwise were some future event not to occur'. In contrast, hard facts are alleged to be facts which 'would have remained the same whether

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 237–8.

or not some future event were to occur'.¹⁶ As a general explication of the distinction between hardness and softness, this is (at best) incomplete. Let us suppose Jack sits at T_1 , and a bird flies at T_2 . So, presumably, the event of Jack's sitting prior to the bird's flying at T_2 occurs at T_1 . The fact of its occurring is, intuitively, a soft fact about T_1 . But now take a certain event which we can suppose occurs at T_2 , say Martha's jogging. Presumably, there are natural ways of filling in the details such that it is true that if Martha were not to jog, nevertheless Jack would have sat at T_1 prior to a bird's flying at T_2 . So, the relevant event – that Jack sits at T_1 prior to a bird's flying at T_2 – would have 'remained the same whether or not some future event were to occur'. Thus, Craig's suggestion, as presented, is clearly inadequate: the problem is that it alludes to the non-occurrence of 'some' future event, but this is insufficiently specific. And it is hard to see how it could be made more specific compatibly with remaining plausible.

(III) 1. Thus far I have argued that I have not misunderstood the original intentions of the authors who introduced the distinction between hard and soft facts into the contemporary philosophical discussion. Further, I have reiterated my position that hardness and fixity are importantly different notions. I now turn to a different point made by Craig.

Craig claims that it is *obvious* that (in my terms) God's prior beliefs are not fixed facts. He says:

The Ockhamist's point seems difficult to deny. For if God is essentially omniscient, then it seems undeniable that I can act in such a way that, were I to do so, God's belief would have been different. For at issue here is a back-tracking counterfactual... even on the standard resolution of vagueness, it is necessarily the case that were I to do differently, God would have foreknown differently. Is it then within my power to do differently? well, why not?¹⁷

Evidently, Craig thinks that the Ockhamist position is obviously true simply in virtue of the truth of the relevant backtracking conditionals. As Craig puts it, 'at issue here is a backtracking counterfactual'. But this is not *all* that is at issue. I grant that the relevant backtracking conditionals are true. But it clearly does not follow that *one has it in one's power to perform the relevant actions*. More specifically, what is at issue is *both* a conditional and a 'can-claim'; indeed, what is at issue is the *relationship* between such backtracking conditionals and the can-claims.

Let us look at this issue more carefully. Suppose Mary stands up at T_2 . Then (on the assumptions with which we have been working) God believed at T_1 that Mary would stand at T_2 . An Ockhamist (of the sort under consideration here) is committed to the following two claims (given that these are 'ordinary' circumstances):

- (i) Mary can at T_2 (or slightly before) refrain from standing up;

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 236–7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 238. Craig makes a similar point in his article, 'Tachyons, Time Travel, and Divine Omniscience', *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXV (1988), 135–6.

- (ii) If Mary were to refrain from standing at T_2 , then God would have believed at T_1 that Mary would refrain from standing at T_2 .

Call (i) the 'can-claim' and (ii) the 'backtracking conditional'. Surely, it is not enough to establish Ockhamism to point to the (putative) truth of (ii); what must be investigated is the *relationship* between (i) and (ii). And it is at least plausible to suppose (as the incompatibilist does) that the truth of (ii) rules out the truth of (i). Insofar as (ii) states that it is a necessary condition of Mary's refraining from standing that some temporally genuine (hard) feature of the past would have been different from what it actually was, it is at least plausible to suppose that (ii)'s truth rules out the truth of (i). The issue, then, is not simply whether a conditional such as (ii) is true; it is necessary to ask about the relationship between such conditionals and the relevant can-claims.

Craig seems to be arguing that since the relevant backtracking conditionals are true, it is obvious that we have power over the past. But his reasoning can be seen to be unacceptable. Suppose I am chained to my desk by very strong chains (which, intuitively, I cannot break). The following conditional may well be true (given the right specification of detail): if I were to leave my office, then I would not have been chained to my desk. But it certainly does not follow from the truth of this conditional that I *can* leave my office, or that I have power over the past (or the chains). In general, if it is a necessary condition of my performing a certain action *A* that I do something which intuitively I cannot do, then I cannot do *A*. And so it is at least plausible to suppose that if it is a necessary condition of my doing something that I so act that some temporally genuine – hard – feature of the past would have been different from what it actually was, then I cannot do the thing in question.

(III). 2. Consider now what I called the 'incompatibilist's constraint'. This says, as Craig acknowledges, that the only way in which God's belief at T_1 about (say) Jones at T_2 could be a soft fact about the past relative to T_2 would be if one and the same state of the mind of the person who was God at T_1 would count as one belief if Jones did *x* at T_2 , but a different belief (or not a belief at all) if Jones did not do *X* at T_2 .¹⁸ Craig says, about the condition mentioned in this constraint, 'But this is not at all what the Ockhamist is committed to; rather he maintains that God would have had a different state

¹⁸ I introduced this constraint in Fischer (1983), pp. 76–79. I wish to clarify a point here. In 'Freedom and Foreknowledge', I employed the term 'God' as a *title-term* to specify a certain role. In contrast, in 'Hard-Type Soft Facts', I employed the term 'God' as a proper name which denotes the individual who possesses the Divine Attributes. This difference implies a difference in the status of the relevant facts. Thus, in 'Freedom and Foreknowledge' I argued that the facts about God's beliefs are plausibly taken to be hard facts, whereas in 'Hard-Type Soft Facts' I argued that they are plausibly taken to be hard-type soft facts. In either case, however, the relevant facts have some 'hard' (temporally non-relational) feature, and thus it is equally plausible to take them to be fixed at later times. In the text of this paper, sometimes I employ the phrase 'hard feature of the past' in a way which is neutral between 'hard fact about the past' and 'hard-type soft fact about the past'.

of mind had Jones acted differently.¹⁹ Now if the Ockhamist is indeed not committed to the condition specified in the constraint, then presumably he could accept its denial. That is, the Ockhamist (according to Craig) could say that it is *not* the case that one and the same state of the person who was God at T_1 would count as one belief if Jones did x at T_2 but a different belief (or not a belief at all) if Jones did not do x at T_2 . But if this is so, then the Ockhamist (I suggested) must concede that there is a crucial difference between the case of God's beliefs and other (indisputable) cases of soft (i.e. temporally relational) facts. Craig says, 'The difference, however, is purely incidental ...'²⁰ But it is *not* incidental. It is important precisely because our intuitions about the fixity of the past (and the relationships between statement pairs consisting of backtracking conditionals and related can-claims) suggest that *hard* (temporally non-relational) facts about the past are fixed, whereas *soft* (temporally relational) facts about the past need not be fixed.²¹

The context of discussion here is one in which 'God' was being taken as a title term. However, precisely the same considerations apply in the context in which 'God' is taken to be a proper name; here one simply says that hard *and* hard-type soft facts are about the past are reasonably taken to be fixed at later times. Craig says:

Fischer says virtually the same thing with respect to 'hard-type' soft facts ... No one can act in such a way that a hard property would not have been possessed by the bearer of that property. And the reason 'having a belief' is a hard property is because it is possible for a person to be in the *same* dispositional state of believing whether or not that belief turns out to be true. But how is this relevant to the question at hand? The issue is God's believing that p , not just the isolated property of 'believing that p '. So long as the fact of God's believing that p is a soft fact about the past, it seems irrelevant whether the isolated property is hard or not.²²

But on what basis does Craig dismiss the relevance of the property? And why exactly is it the case that *the* (only) issue is 'God's believing that p '? In the article to which Craig refers, I argued that it is illuminating to divide certain facts into their constituent individuals and properties. I further stated that it is at least plausible to suppose that no agent can so act that some individual who had a *hard property* in the past would not have had that property. *If* this principle is at least plausible, and *if* (as I argued) it is reasonable to think of believing in general as a hard property, then it is most decidedly *not* the case that the issue about 'believing that p ' is irrelevant, and it is most decidedly *not* the case that the *only* pertinent issue is whether 'God believes that p ' is a soft fact.²³

Craig urges the reader to

Cf. the finest treatment of the notion of temporal necessity by the careful Ockham scholar Alfred J. Freddoso ... On his analysis, a proposition like 'God believes p ' is

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ See, again, note 18.

²² Craig (1989), p. 239.

²³ For developments of the above positions, see my 'Hard-Type Soft Facts'.

not an 'immediate' proposition, since propositions expressing propositional attitudes which are alethically qualified constitute exceptions to the general rule that propositions involving present-time propositional attitudes are immediate. Since, 'God believes p ' is equivalent to 'God correctly believes p ', it is not an immediate proposition and therefore not, in the past tense, temporally necessary.²⁴

I agree: any proposition (or fact) logically equivalent to a soft fact is a soft fact. But it can still be a *hard-type soft fact*: a soft fact with a constituent property that is hard. And this is precisely the case with facts such as 'God believes that p '. Interestingly, although 'God believes that p ' is logically equivalent to 'God correctly believes that p ', the former fact is a hard-type soft fact, whereas the latter is a soft-type soft fact: the former has as its constitutive property the hard property, 'believing that p ', whereas the latter has as its constitutive property the soft property, 'correctly believing that p '. Thus, the analysis provided in 'Hard-Type Soft Facts' provides the materials for a response to the point adduced by Craig insofar as it is employed in the context of Ockhamism: even though 'God believes that p ' is a soft fact, it has a certain sort of hard element – a hard property which is such that an individual (God) possessed it at the relevant time, and the individual would not have possessed it, if the fact were to be falsified (at some later time.)

Incidentally, the 'careful Ockham scholar' to whom Craig alludes, Alfred Freddoso, has rejected Ockhamism, saying:

On a personal note, my own conversion from Ockhamism to Molinism is a direct result of my having finally and reluctantly reached the conclusion that Ockhamism simply cannot deal adequately with genuine prophecy of future contingents.²⁵

(III). 3. Craig says:

In any case, even if one conceded that all past facts are 'fixed', it still does not follow that all future facts entailed by them are similarly necessary. Fischer must also assume the principle, 'If falsifying fact F_1 would require falsifying fact F_2 and one cannot falsify F_2 , then one cannot falsify F_1 .' In other words, Fischer must assume that 'fixity' or temporal necessity is closed under logical entailment. But this has been denied, for example, by Molina, and is by no means obvious.²⁶

I defined ' A can falsify F ' as ' A can so act that F would not obtain', i.e. as ' A can perform some act such that if he were to perform it, F would not obtain.' This is the interpretation of ' A can falsify F ' which is appropriate to my argument, and the relevant principle does *not* seem to be false, on *this* interpretation. What are the alleged counterexamples to the principle, so interpreted?²⁷

²⁴ Craig (1989), p. 240.

²⁵ Alfred J. Freddoso, translation with an introduction and notes, Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV or the Concordia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 61.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 240.

²⁷ Craig cites an article by Hoffman and Rosenkrantz: Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, 'On Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom', *Philosophical Studies*, xxxvii (1980), 289–96. (It is useful also to see Rowe's response to Hoffman and Rosenkrantz: William L. Rowe, 'On Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: A Reply', *Philosophical Studies* xxxvii (1980), 429–30.

In the article to which Craig adverts by Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, the authors do indeed argue that ‘having it within one’s power’ is not closed under entailment, but this point is *irrelevant* to an assessment of the principle Craig attributes to me, as I shall proceed to explain. The principle of the closure of ‘having it within one’s power’ under entailment is this: If an agent has it in his power to bring about P and P entails Q , then the agent has it in his power to bring about Q . It is clear that there are counterexamples to this principle, if it is interpreted in a *strongly causal* way. So, for example, given this principle, if I have it in my power to bring it about that Mary is happy, and Mary’s being happy entails that Mary came into existence, then I have it in my power to bring it about that Mary came into existence. But the conclusion is unacceptable, so it is alleged that that principle is invalid.

I agree, insofar as the principle is interpreted as above. But the interpretation of ‘can falsify’ which I have explicitly adopted generates a different interpretation of the principle – one which immunizes it from the putative counter-examples. I construe ‘ A can falsify p ’ as ‘ A can perform some act such that if he were to perform it, p would be false.’²⁸ Similarly, then, one can understand ‘ A can bring about p ’ as ‘ A can perform some act such that if he were to perform it, p would be the case.’²⁹ And on *this* interpretation, the principle is apparently immune from the Hoffman/Rosenkrantz counter-examples: If I can perform some act such that if I were to perform it, Mary would be happy, then I can perform some act such that if I were to perform it, Mary would have come into existence. Thus, the closure principle, so construed, is not obviously invalid.

Further, the principle of falsification Craig attributes to me is of a *different form* from the closure principle. The pertinent principle of falsification is: ‘If A cannot falsify F_2 , and if A were to falsify F_1 then A would falsify F_2 , then A cannot falsify F_1 .’ Among other differences, the second conjuncts in the antecedents of the conditionals are different: whereas in the closure principle the propositions themselves are taken to be related by entailment, in the falsification principle the *falsification* of the propositions (by an agent in certain circumstances) is supposed to be subjunctively related. I do not see what Craig takes the relationship between the two principles to be. Perhaps he believes that if Hoffman and Rosenkrantz have shown the closure principle to be false, it follows that the falsification principle is false. But this is evidently incorrect: the principles are relevantly different. *Even if* the relevant interpretation of the principles is strongly causal, and even if Hoffman and Rosenkrantz have shown that the closure principle is invalid, it would *not* follow that the falsification principle is invalid. I concede that on the

²⁸ I assume that talk about falsifying facts and falsifying propositions is interchangeable here.

²⁹ Clearly, these notions are intended to be quasi-technical notions. They play a certain role in the relevant arguments, but they are not intended to give an analysis of some pre-theoretic concept.

strongly causal interpretation I cannot falsify the fact that Mary came into existence. Nevertheless, I may be able to make her happy. The falsification principle is no obstacle to this claim, since the relevant conditional (needed in order to generate a Hoffman/Rosenkrantz style counter-example), 'If I were to falsify the fact that Mary is not happy, then I would falsify the fact that she came into existence', is *false*.

As far as I can see, then, Craig has not made it plausible that there are counterexamples to the principle of falsification. And this is precisely what we should expect, since the principle captures the powerful intuitive idea to which I have had recourse above: if doing one thing requires doing something else which one intuitively *cannot* do, then one cannot do the first thing.

(III).4. Craig raises the (always delicate and fine) issue of burden of proof. Craig says:

Fischer concedes '... I haven't established that no human can so act that some actual bearer of a hard property in the past wouldn't have had that property.' But he dismisses any need to do this because the Ockhamist has not offered any 'non-question-begging examples of hard-type soft facts (relative to certain times) which are, intuitively, not fixed at later times.' But whose responsibility is it to bear the burden of proof here? ... It is Fischer or the fatalist who must prove some sort of 'fixed past principle' or temporal necessity's closure under entailment if his argument is to be successful. Since Fischer has proved neither of these, his argument for theological fatalism fails.³⁰

Arguments pertaining to the burden of proof are always difficult, but it is fair to say that Craig proceeds too swiftly here. He alleges that since I have not *proved* certain principles employed in an argument, it follows that the argument fails. But this constraint on philosophical dialectic is too strong. I presented an argument which employs certain principles which have – it must be conceded – at least some intuitive plausibility. I have argued against a certain strategy of response to the argument – what I called the Ockhamistic response.³¹ I never claimed that the argument in question is clearly sound. Further, it would be unreasonable to demand that a proponent of a philosophical argument *prove* all of its premises, lest the argument be deemed to have failed. (Employing this demand, one could rid the world of just about *all* interesting philosophical arguments, I suppose.)

(IV). Quite apart from considerations of burden of proof, Craig believes that the Ockhamist is not at a loss for examples of 'soft facts which involve hard properties but which are nevertheless not fixed at later times'.³² He claims that 'fatalistic positions' have been 'effectively rebutted' in such fields

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 240.

³¹ Note here that I did *not* make the claim which Craig ascribes to me. That is, I did not claim that there is no need to establish that no human can so act that some actual bearer of a hard property in the past wouldn't have had that property because the Ockhamist has not offered any non-question-begging examples of hard-type soft facts (relative to certain times) which are, intuitively, not fixed at later times. What I *did* say was something different. I said that one need not establish the claim in question in order to show that a certain Ockhamistic strategy fails.

³² *Ibid.*

as the Special Theory of Relativity, retrocausation, time travel, precognition, and Newcomb's Paradox.³³

The first thing to say is simply that the list of fields offered by Craig contains members all of which involve extremely complicated, nuanced, and highly contentious issues. It would be rather optimistic indeed to come to confident conclusions on the basis of *any* examples from *any* of these fields: physicists, psychologists, and philosophers disagree vigorously about the issues here. Having said this, I proceed to analyse Craig's list, point by point.

(IV). 1. Craig points out that some have claimed that the Special Theory of Relativity implies the 'B-theory of time, according to which all events whether past, present, or future for us – are equally real and temporal becoming is not an objective property of the world.'³⁴ Craig further points out that some have argued that on such a view of time, it is possible for there to be an event *P* which lies in the absolute future of observer W_1 but is wholly past for W_2 . In such a case, it is alleged by those who accept the fixity of the past that W_2 cannot do anything to prevent *P* (insofar as it is in the past relative to W_2 and the past is fixed). Thus, fatalism would follow, as *P* would be inevitable also for W_1 .

Craig argues that this form of reasoning is fallacious. He says:

All W_2 has the right to conclude from his observation of *P* is that W_1 *will* not prevent *P*, not that he *cannot* prevent *P*. If W_1 were to act differently, W_2 would not have observed *P*, but from his having observed *P* he knows that W_1 will not in fact so act... W_2 's knowledge of W_1 's future is a very interesting analogue to divine foreknowledge.³⁵

But clearly it is highly contentious whether it is indeed true that *all* W_2 has the right to conclude from his observation of *P* is that W_1 will not prevent *P*, not that he cannot prevent *P*. The point is that there are some circumstances which *both* make it possible to know that an agent will act in a certain way *and* imply that if this agent were to do otherwise, hard features of the past would have been different from what they actually were. When circumstances imply not only the former but also the latter, there is at least some reason to suppose that the agent *cannot* do otherwise. Whenever Craig alleges that *all* we know is that an agent in certain circumstances *will* do something and not that he *must* do it, we need to ask whether the circumstances imply *not only* that the agent will do the act in question but also that if he were to do otherwise, then the past would have been different from what it actually was. If the latter, then it is most definitely *not* apparent that *all* we know is that the agent will behave as he does.

(IV). 2. It should be clear that even if retrocausation were coherent, this would not be enough to vindicate any sort of compatibilism. This is because the compatibilist requires not just that agents be able to initiate backward-flowing causal chains, but that they be able so to act that the past *would have*

³³ *Ibid.* p. 241.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 242.

been different from how it actually was. But Craig is not claiming that the mere (putative) coherence of retrocausation is sufficient to vindicate compatibilism. Rather, he claims that a certain argument against the coherence of retrocausation makes an error similar to that of the theological fatalist. Craig says:

Antony Flew proposed a ‘biking experiment’ to invalidate retrocausation by preventing the retrocause after observing the effect. According to Flew, if after observing the effect we cannot prevent the cause, then fatalism ensues; but if we can prevent the cause, then we have the ability to change the past, which is impossible. The analogy to theological fatalism is obvious.³⁶

But Craig claims that there is a fallacy in Flew’s reasoning:

from the occurrence of the effect, it follows that the cause will occur. We *can* prevent the cause, but we *shall* not. If we *were* to prevent the cause, then the effect *would not* have occurred ... The failure of Flew’s objection is a vindication of the Ockhamist.³⁷

Obviously, the same analysis developed above applies here. Given the occurrence of the effect, the only way the agent can prevent the cause is by so acting that the effect would not have occurred, i.e. by so acting that a temporally genuine feature of the past would have different from what it actually was. It is thus plausible to suppose that in such circumstances the agent *cannot* prevent the effect. In a world in which there is retrocausation, there would thus be *local fatalism* – fatalism with regard to the backward-flowing causal chains. One should however point out that this does not entail *global* fatalism, and this is in my judgement the proper response to Flew. (Of course, in a world in which *all* situations are characterized by retrocausation, there might be global fatalism, but I do not know why this would be a problematic result, since in such a world our ordinary notions of freedom, responsibility, deliberation, and so forth would not apply.)

(IV). 3. The third field invoked by Craig is the field of time travel. Again, this is hardly an uncontroversial domain. And the considerations adduced by Craig are quite subtle:

Earman invites us, for example, to envision a rocket ship which at some space-time point x can fire a probe which will travel along a time-like loop into the past lobe of x ’s light cone. The rocket will fire the probe unless a safety switch is on; but the switch turns on if and only if a sensing device detects the ‘return’ of the probe. Hence, the probe is fired if and only if it is not fired. Since such devices are possible in our world, it follows that time travel is impossible. Engaging as this reasoning is, it again commits much the same mistake as theological fatalism. As Horwich argues, Earman invalidly infers that since time-like loops and the various devices are possible, time-like loops do not, therefore, exist. But time-like loops can exist in any world in which such devices are possible, but never in fact exist or function properly. If the devices were to exist or function properly, then the time-like loops would not exist.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Now obviously God's foreknowledge of some event is analogous to the time-like loops... The existence of the loops in any world is a 'hard-type soft fact', and the time traveller is powerless to affect them; nevertheless, the backtracking counterfactual is in order because there is no logically possible world in which the loops exist and the devices work. But in the same way, if God is essentially omniscient, then even if it is wholly outside our power to influence His beliefs, it follows that we can act such that, were we to do so, His foreknowledge would have been different.³⁸

This is an interesting, but highly compressed argument. I reconstruct the leading ideas as follows. God's foreknowledge that *A* will do *X* is analogous to the existence of time-like loops. And the building of properly functioning machines of the sort described is like *A*'s refraining from doing *X*. Craig's claim is that agents *could* build such properly functioning machines, just as the agent *can* refrain from doing *X*. Of course, if such machines were built and functioned properly, then time-like loops would not exist; similarly, if *A* refrained from doing *X*, then God would have had a different belief in the past, i.e. a belief that *A* would refrain from doing *X*.

First, it is unclear to me why the time-like loops are supposed to be 'hard-type soft facts'. Such facts are decomposable (naturally) into an individual and a temporally non-relational (hard) property. But how are the time-like loops so decomposable? What are the individuals, and what are the relevant properties? Further, exactly the same problem plagues Craig's discussion here as was diagnosed above: the mere fact that a certain backtracking conditional is true does not suffice for the truth of the pertinent can-claim. Indeed, it is at least reasonable to suppose that the truth of such a conditional *rules out* the truth of a can-claim, insofar as the conditional asserts that it is a necessary condition of doing the act in question that a genuine, non-relational feature of the past would have been different from what it actually was. So, given that there actually are time-like loops and given the truth of the backtracking conditional (which Craig alleges is true here) that if the machines were built and functioned properly, there would have been no time-like loops, it follows that it is reasonable to assert that such properly functioning machines *cannot* be built. If it is a necessary condition of building these machines that some genuine feature of the past not have obtained, then there is some reason to suppose that the machines cannot be built. As far as I can see, the only way in which such examples can support Ockhamism is if it is supposed that the issue of the truth of the relevant backtracking conditionals is the only relevant issue and thus that such conditionals pose absolutely no problem for the paired can claims. But this supposition has been called into question.

(IV).4. We are now asked to consider the field of parapsychology:

Flew's biking experiment is [alleged to be] fatal in such cases [of putatively genuine human precognition]. But we have already seen the fallacious fatalistic reasoning that underlies this conclusion...if the predicted event is prevented, then genuine

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 244.

precognition did not occur. If one stipulates that genuine precognition did occur, then it follows that the precognized event will occur, but not that it must occur. If the event were not to occur, then the precognition would not have been made ... The failure of the fatalistic objection in the realm of parapsychology is further vindication of the Ockhamist stance in philosophy of religion.³⁹

Craig's mistake here is exactly parallel to his mistaken assimilation of God's beliefs and Smith's knowledge (discussed and criticized above). Genuine human precognition, if it exists, is human foreknowledge. But facts about such states are *soft* (temporally relational) facts, and, indeed, *soft-type soft facts*. The fact about Smith is decomposable into the individual, Smith, and the temporally relational (soft) property, 'knowing that *p*'. In contrast, the fact about God's belief is a *hard-type soft fact*: it is decomposable into an individual (God) and a temporally nonrelational (hard) property, 'believing that *p*'. Thus, whereas there is no reason to think that the backtracking conditional whose consequent specifies a difference in a human's knowledge rules out the relevant can-claim, there *is* at least some reason to think that the backtracking conditional whose consequent specifies a difference in God's beliefs rules out the relevant can-claim.

(IV).5. Finally, Craig adverts to Newcomb's Paradox. He claims that 'Newcomb's Paradox is the final vindication of the Ockhamist, for the parallel between the predictor and God is patent and, indeed, in some discussions, the predictor is identified as God.'⁴⁰ I shall briefly lay out the structure of Newcomb's Paradox, and I shall give my analysis of its relationship to Ockhamism.

You are confronted with two opaque boxes, *A* and *B*. You know that box *B* contains \$1,000 and that box *A* contains either \$1,000,000 or nothing at all. You can choose to take both boxes or to take just box *A*. You know that the money was put there eighty years ago by an extremely knowledgeable agent according to the following plan: if he believed that you would take both boxes, he put \$1,000 in box *B* and nothing in box *A*; if, on the other hand, he believed that you would take only box *A*, he put \$1,000 in box *B* and \$1,000,000 in box *A*. What should you do – take both boxes or just box *A*?

This is an interesting puzzle, insofar as there seem to be good reasons for both possible choices. But some have argued that it is evident what you should do, if the predictor is God. Craig says:

if the predictor is essentially infallible, then there is no debate: the one-box choice is correct simply because there are no possible worlds in which the predictor errs and one winds up with \$1,001,000. The choice is between receiving \$1,000,000 or \$1,000; and it takes no genius to make this decision.⁴¹

But even if what Craig says here is true, it is hard to see its relevance to Ockhamism or any other form of theological compatibilism. Let's suppose

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 244.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 245.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

that you adopt Craig's analysis and opt for choosing the one box (and that you do indeed choose it). It follows that the predictor (God) knew this in advance. Thus, you did something such that if you were to do it, God would have put the \$1,000,000 in box *A*. This is then an example in which a certain backtracking conditional is true, but note that it is *not* a backtracking *counterfactual*. And it is not enough to vindicate compatibilism to present a case in which both a can-claim and an appropriate backtracking conditional are true; what is necessary is a case in which both a can-claim and a backtracking *counterfactual* are true. That is, the compatibilist must contend that there are cases in which an agent can so act that temporally non-relational – hard – features of the past would have been different from the way they actually were.

Perhaps Craig will respond as follows. Whereas what has been said so far is correct, it neglects the fact that you have it in your power (in the puzzle circumstances) either to choose the one box or the two boxes. Given that God actually knew that you would choose the one, that you nevertheless have the power to choose the two, and that if you were to choose the two, God would have known that you would choose the two, you obviously have the power so to act that God would have had a different belief in the past from the belief He actually had.

But remember the dialectical situation here. The issue that is being debated is whether God's foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom. Thus, it is obviously inappropriate simply to *assume* a set of circumstances in which God exists and has foreknowledge and nevertheless a human agent is free. It is dialectically unfair simply to *assert* that although God exists and knew eighty years in advance that you would choose the one box, nevertheless you had it in your power to choose the two boxes. Of course, the incompatibilist will not be surprised to learn that if you *begin* with the assumption that God's foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom, then you can 'generate' the conclusion that humans can sometimes perform acts which are such that, if they were to perform them, the past would have been different from the way it actually was. But to begin with this assumption is to beg the question in an egregious fashion.

What then is the significance of Newcomb's Paradox with God as predictor? I believe that the puzzle, so construed, raises interesting questions for a theological compatibilist. That is, if one accepts theological compatibilism, then one can legitimately think about the puzzle and consider what it shows about various approaches to rational choice and practical deliberation. But it *cannot* be invoked (at least in the way suggested above) to *establish* theological compatibilism.

(V). To summarize: 'Ockhamism' can be used as a name for a class of strategies for responding to an argument proceeding from the fixity of the past to the conclusion that God's foreknowledge is incompatible with human

freedom. In this paper, I have attempted to clarify the leading ideas behind the incompatibilist's argument. I have not claimed that the argument is decisive, only that it has a certain plausibility and is thus worth taking seriously. Further, I have tried to clarify some considerations by reference to which I have argued that the Ockhamist's strategy of response to this argument is unpromising. Of course, even if Ockhamism proves to be untenable, there are other ways of seeking to avert theological fatalism.⁴²

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⁴² I have been helped by discussions with Alexander Rosenberg and Mark Ravizza. I have benefited from the support of the Center for Ideas and Society, University of California, Riverside.