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DISPOSITIONAL OMNISCIENCE

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I know that Clinton was elected to the U.S. Presidency in 1992. I know this *now* (at time t_1), when I happen to be thinking about it while using it as an example in a paper. But I might also know it *later* (at time t_2), when I am thinking about something else. In general, knowing something does not require actively thinking it; indeed, *most* true ascriptions of knowledge (e.g., that James knows that he is bald, that Jane knows whether 2^3 is greater than 3^2 , that Clinton knows the color of the carpet in the Oval Office) are made on occasions when the knower is *not* actively entertaining the belief in question.

At least this is the way we apply the concept of knowledge when talking about the cognitions of creatures like ourselves. When it comes to divine cognitions, however, one finds the concept getting applied rather differently. The standard approach to divine knowledge in the literature is to regard the exceptional case of knowing for human beings – actively thinking what one knows – as the only case of knowing for God. Such a position, which I will refer to as the ‘standard view,’ would appear to rest on one or more of the following assumptions: (a) that God is never related to the objects of His knowledge in the way that I am related to Clinton’s 1992 election victory at t_2 ; (b) that were He so related, it would not count for Him as knowledge; and (c) that were it to count for Him as knowledge, it would still not count toward the kind of knowledge required by the doctrine of divine omniscience. These are substantive assumptions with important implications for the nature of knowledge as well as the theistic conception of God; yet there is virtually no discussion of them in the literature. Such neglect cannot be attributed to mere indifference, for no theistic attribute has been more closely examined than omniscience. Entire books and scores of articles have probed the subject, addressing a wide range of issues

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which include, e.g., whether divine omniscience encompasses future contingencies, whether it is propositional in form, whether it includes singular propositions about future individuals, whether it grasps the future through simple or middle knowledge, and so on. Yet amidst this surfeit of scholarly attention, the standard view is simply taken for granted.¹ One of the few places the issue is even raised is Edward Wierenga's recent book *The Nature of God*. Yet Wierenga's treatment of it is not very encouraging: having found implicit support for the standard view in St. Thomas, Wierenga defers to the authority of the Angelic Doctor and moves on to more pressing questions.²

My objective in the present paper is to bring this issue into the open as one worthy of serious attention in discussions of the theistic conception of God. I shall pursue this objective by presenting an unfavorable cost-benefit analysis of the standard view. The evidence on which this analysis is based will of course be partial, and I cannot claim with any confidence that the total evidence would yield the same result; but only further discussion, of the sort I hope this essay encourages, can bring this out. The primary evidence to be cited for the costliness of the standard view consists of two notorious difficulties with divine omniscience, difficulties which must be counted against the standard view since (as I shall show) there are other accounts of divine knowledge under which they are avoided. I shall then examine the benefit side of the ledger, consisting of certain theological advantages that the standard view appears to enjoy over its rivals, but which (I shall argue) are less significant than they might initially appear. Before undertaking this comparison, however, it is first necessary to say something more about the alternative conceptions of divine knowledge which will figure in the discussion.

THREE GRADES OF COGNITIVE INVOLVEMENT

The difference between my relation at t_1 and my relation at t_2 to the proposition that Clinton was elected to the U.S. Presidency in 1992 illustrates just two of the many ways a person can be cognitively related to a proposition. Rather than attempting a complete taxonomy of such

relations, however, my larger purpose in this essay will be best served by a focus on just three of them.

Let us say that my knowledge at t_1 of Clinton's election victory is a case of *occurrent* knowledge, while my knowledge at t_2 of his election victory is a case of *nonoccurrent* knowledge. In distinguishing occurrent from nonoccurrent knowledge, it is important to conceive the latter in such a way that it does not simply collapse into no knowledge at all. This is usually done by appealing to *dispositions*. Wierenga, for example, explains the distinction as applied to beliefs in the following way: "A person who has an occurrent belief in a proposition actually has that proposition in mind; whereas a person who has a dispositional belief in a proposition is *disposed* to have an occurrent belief in it; that is, roughly, the person would have an occurrent belief in it if he or she were to consider it or to have it in mind."³ Alvin Goldman offers a similar analysis, illustrating the distinction as follows:

There are various times during the past month when John had occurrent beliefs that $7 + 4 = 11$ – namely when he consciously affirmed or assented to this, e.g. while doing a sum. But at *any* time during this month, not only on those occasions, it would have been correct to say that John believed that $7 + 4 = 11$... [in that] *if* John's attention had been turned to the question of whether $7 + 4 = 11$, he would have had an occurrent belief to this effect.⁴

Similar accounts may also be found in John Pollock, Richard Foley, and many others.⁵ Assuming that dispositional knowledge just *is* dispositional belief which meets the right conditions (truth, warrant, etc.), what Goldman *et al.* say about belief should also be true of knowledge.

Since this is the understanding of dispositional belief/knowledge with which I shall be working in this paper, I should comment briefly on why I shall be all but ignoring an alternative (and venerable) tradition, associated with such names as Alexander Bain, Charles Peirce, Frank Ramsey, Richard Braithwaite, and Gilbert Ryle, which understands the dispositional belief that p as primarily a disposition to *act* in ways appropriate to p 's being the case, rather than just a disposition to *think* (= believe occurrently) that p .⁶ My excuse for slighting this tradition is that the disposition to think that p is itself a disposition to act which

is appropriate to *p*'s being the case – indeed, it is arguably the most fundamental of the various dispositions to act which are associated with the dispositional belief that *p*. Many dispositional beliefs have few if any implications for action other than the act of affirming them (mentally or verbally) on suitable occasions. Where there are dispositions to act in ways appropriate to *p*'s being the case which go significantly beyond the disposition to assent to *p*, exercising the disposition often (and for some classes of intentional actions, perhaps *always*) requires that one first make occurrent a belief that *p*; and even when the appropriate actions can and do take place in the absence of an occurrent belief, there may still exist in the subject an unexercised disposition to form the occurrent belief in the right circumstances. Cases in which one has a disposition to act in ways appropriate to *p*'s being true but no disposition to (occurrently) believe that *p* may be best characterized as cases in which there simply is no dispositional belief that *p*; and if there are any such cases which are not best characterized this way, I think we would nevertheless grant that these are dispositional beliefs in a different sense, or of a markedly different kind, than are those which involve a disposition to believe. So even if the Bain-Peirce-Ramsey-Braithwaite-Ryle approach to dispositional belief offers a richer account of the general phenomenon, either all dispositional beliefs involve the disposition to form an occurrent belief or those that don't belong to an aberrant species of dispositional belief. But there is good reason in the present context to exclude the latter from consideration. This is because the standard view makes occurrent belief the hallmark of God's knowledge, and it is desirable to limn the advantages of relatively minimal changes in this view before canvassing more radical ones. A conception of divine omniscience which drops the requirement of occurrent belief but replaces it with a disposition toward occurrent belief is clearly closer to the standard view than one which makes no reference to occurrent belief at all.⁷

With this in mind, let us revert to the position of Goldman *et al.* and say that the general form of dispositional belief is given by

The Broad Schema. Were circumstance *c* to obtain, *x* would have an occurrent belief that *p*.

As it stands, however, the Broad Schema is *so* broad that it is virtually useless in identifying instances of dispositional knowledge. There clearly needs to be some restriction on *c*, if only to preclude the vacuous case where *c* is simply the circumstance of *x*'s holding the occurrent belief that *p*. Both Goldman and Wierenga agree that the circumstance relevant to dispositional belief is one in which the subject *considers whether p*. This yields what I shall call

The Narrow Schema. Were *x* to consider whether *p*, *x* would have an occurrent belief that *p*.

But this is surely *too* narrow: nothing in the concept of dispositional knowledge suggests that considering whether *p* is the only – or even *a* – sufficient condition for the exercise of a disposition to believe that *p*. (If I consider in vain whether the person in the police lineup is the person I saw holding up the bank, only to recognize him by a distinctive gesture after I have stopped considering the matter, this might simply confirm rather than refute the claim that I knew all along who the person is.) The most one can say, I think, is that certain *paradigms* of dispositional knowledge might be such that considering whether a proposition is true would be sufficient to trigger an occurrent belief in that proposition.

Even the Narrow Schema, however, can appear excessively broad when one takes into account the variety of ways in which considering *p* can result in an occurrent belief that *p*. The following, for example, are three of the more notable scenarios under which John might affirm that $7 + 4 = 11$ if he considered whether $7 + 4 = 11$. The most likely case, and the one that Goldman presumably had in mind, is where John's disposition is based on rote memory: past occasions on which he confidently affirmed that $7 + 4 = 11$ have so reinforced his memory of this sum that merely considering whether $7 + 4 = 11$ is sufficient for him to have an occurrent belief to this effect. Another scenario is one in which John is disposed to believe that $7 + 4 = 11$, not because he has it stored in his memory, but because he can figure it out: he is sufficiently skilled at doing simple sums and sufficiently desirous of knowing the answer to this particular sum that, were he to consider whether $7 + 4 = 11$, he would make successful use of his arithmetical ability. Finally, John might have a disposition to believe that $7 + 4 = 11$, not because he

can remember it or infer it (a freak brain lesion having left him helpless with sums over one digit), but because the answer is available to him by using a calculator, consulting a table of sums, asking someone who knows, etc. (If John carries a calculator with him at all times, is proficient in its use, and has a strong enough reason for wanting to know the sum of $7 + 4$, conditions may be such that, were he to consider whether $7 + 4 = 11$, he would come to believe that $7 + 4 = 11$.) The same scenarios could also apply to my disposition to believe that Clinton won the 1992 election, which might rest on the fact that I have a vivid memory of the 1992 presidential campaign, the fact that I am sufficiently stocked with other items of knowledge that I can deduce the right answer (which is what actually happened when I wrote the first paragraph of this paper, my calculations going something like this: "it is now 1993, the election was last November, therefore he must have won in 1992"), or the fact that I command the kinds of resources that make it easy for me to find out what happened (e.g., by consulting an up-to-date almanac which lies at my elbow).

Here, then, are three scenarios, featuring *memory*, *inference*, and *discovery*, which are such that the closest nonactual world in which x considers whether p is a world in which x comes to hold the occurrent belief that p . Thus the counterfactual constituting the Narrow Schema is true in all three cases. Still, while any scenario which satisfies the Narrow Schema may fairly be described as a case of someone being disposed to hold an occurrent belief, perhaps not all such cases are ones in which we would wish to attribute to x the (nonoccurrent) belief that p . This point can be illustrated with reference to the cases presented in the preceding paragraph. When a person is disposed to believe that p in virtue of possessing a capacity to remember that p , we consider such a person to believe that p even when the disposition is not being exercised; but when a person is disposed to believe that p merely in virtue of possessing a capacity to discover that p , we do not ordinarily consider such a person to believe that p in the absence of any exercise of this disposition. Dispositions to believe based on a capacity to infer fall somewhere in the middle: it is doubtful that the ordinary grammar of 'belief' unambiguously settles the question whether, when an occurrent belief that Clinton won the 1992 election is achievable only through

memory *supplemented by inference*, I may nevertheless be credited with a (nonoccurrent) belief that Clinton won in 1992; nor are philosophical accounts of the matter any closer to consensus.⁸

Setting aside the case of inference, where intuitions are divided, the reason we accept a disposition to remember that *p* but not a disposition to discover that *p* as constituting a (nonoccurrent) belief that *p* springs from our conception of remembering as the calling up of a belief that the person already possesses, prior to calling it up. This involves attributing to the subject an unconscious mental state which serves to “store” the belief when it is not occurrent – a feature completely missing from dispositions to discover. Thus an ability to remember counts as (nonoccurrent) belief, not simply in virtue of its supporting a disposition to believe (a disposition which it shares with the abilities to infer and discover), but in virtue of the critical role played in the exercise of this ability by a mental state which, in some non-Pickwickian sense, is itself a belief. But what is it exactly about this mental state that warrants regarding it as a belief, or warrants attributing belief to its possessor? A brief look at five answers to this question reveals the situation to be far more complex than this initial characterization would suggest.

Identity. The most straightforward account is one in which conscious belief and memory trace are regarded simply as two different states (occurrent *v.* nonoccurrent) of a single thing. This is how Plato represents our cognitive situation in the “aviary” metaphor at *Theaetetus* 196D–199C, where one and the same bird may be possessed by its captor in either of two senses: “nonoccurrently,” when confined in the aviary; and “occurrently,” when grasped by the fowler in his hand. Another metaphor, also identifying occurrent with nonoccurrent beliefs, is offered by the cognitive psychologist John Anderson, who compares memories to light bulbs which may be on (activated, occurrent) or off (unactivated, nonoccurrent).⁹ But both metaphors, whatever their merits for other purposes, are misleading at just that point where they touch on the present proposal. A nonoccurrent memory state is presumably (something like) an unconscious configuration of brain cells, while an occurrent belief is a conscious affirmation of a proposition. That makes them about as different as any two things could be – certainly the idea that they are simply different states of the same thing is not the first

thought that would pop into one's mind. In this respect the mind seems less like an aviary than like a tape-player, with the magnetic patterns on the tape paralleling nonoccurrent belief and the audible sounds emerging from the speaker paralleling occurrent belief. A particular tract of tape may pass from "dormancy" to "activity" when the "play" button is pressed, but the relation between the "activated" tape and the sounds it makes is causal, not one of identity. (Or to revert to the light-bulb metaphor, occurrent belief is more like the *light* than it is like the *lit bulb*).

Content. If occurrent and nonoccurrent belief are not a single thing possessing different properties (at different times), perhaps they are different things possessing a common property. The obvious candidate is the property of having a particular propositional *content*. On this view, a memory state qualifies as a bona fide belief in virtue of its "encoding" the same information to which an occurrent belief gives conscious expression. This is in keeping with the tape-player model of the preceding paragraph, a model under which it is no less legitimate (or more mysterious) to say of someone endowed with the right configuration of memory-stuff that he literally possesses *that belief*, though he may be currently unconscious of that fact, than it is to say of a particular tape, and not just of the music issuing from it, that *this* is Brahms' *Double Concerto*. Of course, this manner of speaking is merely elliptical: a nonoccurrent representational state has the content *p* only because of its causal relationship to an actual or potential occurrent episode having the content *p*. But if such borrowed content is good enough for ascribing belief to the memorious, it is too promiscuous to privilege memory over discovery: just as the content of the occurrent belief that *p* may be assigned to the unconscious configurations of memory-stuff which *x* would access were he to *remember* that *p*, so the content of the occurrent belief that *q* might be assigned to the unconscious configurations of print on the pages of the encyclopaedia which *x* would access were he to *discover* that *q*.

Origin. If nonoccurrent belief states are to be distinguished from non-belief states, not just by having content but by playing a particular causal role, one obvious suggestion is that beliefs attributed in virtue of unconscious memory traces must be the causal record of an original

incident of occurrent belief. But insofar as this claim rests on the point that ‘memory’ is a “success noun” and so must be veridical, or that ‘trace’ presupposes some antecedent episode of which it is the vestige, the claim is no more persuasive than the brief for causal determinism which appeals to the analytic truth that all effects have causes. Moreover, it just seems false. Most birds in my aviary may be there because I put them there, but defects in the cage may have allowed some to wander in on their own, pranksters may have introduced others while my back was turned, etc. There is no better reason to suppose that nonoccurrent belief *must* originate in occurrent belief than there is to suppose that the only birds in my aviary are ones that I personally entrapped. In any event, this appeal to the origins of nonoccurrent belief fails to distinguish memory traces from lines in an encyclopaedia, which presumably also had their origins in conscious thought.

Function. Suppose we shift attention from the origin of memory states in prior occurrent beliefs to their function in the production of further occurrent beliefs. Where the belief that *p* is encoded in memory-stuff, considering whether *p* may be sufficient to produce an occurrent belief that *p*, without any of the conative factors (desire to know, expenditure of effort) that are necessary in the case of discovering that *p*. Here the process by which considering whether *p* activates a dormant memory which in turn yields an occurrent belief is immediate and automatic, so that considering whether *p* may naturally be thought of as “triggering” the resultant belief, a locution that hardly seems appropriate when the belief must await a lengthy deliberation or the perusal of an encyclopaedia. (Perhaps the term ‘disposition’ should even be reserved for such cases, where the subject is “primed” to react in a particular way under the right conditions, allowing us to speak of a *disposition* to remember but only of an *ability* or *potential* to discover.) But this idealized picture of how memory works does not fit all cases (remembering is often laborious business requiring strong conations); moreover, it fails to exclude all cases of discovering, which can be just as automatic as the most facile cases of remembering (e.g., where, upon wondering how late it is, I immediately notice that it has grown dark outside). Whether it is easier to lay hands on a caged or an uncaged bird depends in part on the kind of bird it is.

Location. Since remembering, unlike discovering, involves the retrieval of information that already existed *in the subject* prior to remembering, the direct approach is simply to add the requirement that belief is *wholly* an internal matter. But even if the current debate over wide *v.* narrow content were resolved in a manner compatible with this requirement, its crucial distinction between *internal* and *external* would be too arbitrary to bear the weight imposed upon it. Suppose prosthetic memory devices become available: we strap them on our heads and they increase our mental storage capacity. Are they to be regarded as internal or external repositories of information? If they can be purchased pre-programmed with *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, would tapping them be more like remembering or discovering? Perhaps the significance of the internal-external distinction really rests on the relative *security* of internal states: mere possession of an encyclopaedia does not entitle me to claim possession of the knowledge that can be derived from it because the latter is overly dependent on factors outside my control which threaten my possession, such as destruction of the encyclopaedia through fire or mildew, or its unavailability owing to theft or failing eyesight. But the prosthetic memory device is similarly dependent; so is the *brain*, for that matter. (What is "external" to the self, and what "internal," in the latter case?)

Much more could be said under the preceding rubrics, and there are others that could be considered as well. But it is not necessary to achieve any sort of "completeness" in the discussion of this topic, since I am not trying to show that there is *no* sense of 'belief' in which dispositions to remember are to be classified with occurrent belief but dispositions to discover are not. (And it's a good thing, too, since the ordinary conception of 'belief' appears to be broadly of this sort.) What the foregoing remarks do suggest, however, is that the distinction between dispositions to believe which count as (nonoccurrent) beliefs and dispositions to believe which do not count as beliefs is much harder to make out than one might have thought – at least if the distinction is to have the epistemic significance we ordinarily attribute to it. As Joseph Margolis observes, "[t]he line between knowing-that and knowing-how is extremely difficult to draw and there are serious puzzles involved in attempting to construe knowing-that in ways that do not depend on just

the sort of talents and skills that are ordinarily associated with knowing-how.”¹⁰ In this spirit, and for purposes of the following discussion, I propose that we understand the concept of knowledge to comprise varying “grades of cognitive involvement” in a proposition, and that we include among these (suitable instances of) the disposition to discover. I shall henceforth distinguish grades of cognitive involvement by attaching a subscript to ‘knowledge’, with larger subscripts indicating more tenuous involvement; I shall likewise extend the use of ‘belief’ to match that of ‘knowledge’, so that

(K) x knows at t that $p \supset x$ believes at t that p .

While this manner of speaking is admittedly stipulative when it comes to dispositions to discover, I am inclined to concur in Alvin Goldman’s judgment that “[e]pistemology might be well-advised to give scant attention to the question of what is *ordinarily* called ‘belief’.”¹¹ In any case, it is hoped that the considerations presented in the preceding paragraphs will at least make the reader feel comfortable with the stipulation. (The stipulation is considerably less strained in the case of God, as we shall see in the last section of the paper.)¹²

The arguments to come will draw upon just three grades of cognitive involvement: occurrent knowledge, dispositions to remember, and dispositions to discover. I assume that these differ primarily with respect to their “belief-conditions”; in any case, belief and truth are the only conditions that will be relevant to later discussion. I will therefore not attempt to supply complete necessary and sufficient conditions for each type of knowledge (which is a vexed question even for garden-variety occurrent knowledge), but will limit my analyses to the corresponding concepts of “belief.” The first definition is perfectly straightforward:

(B1) x believes₁ at t that p =df. x has at t an occurrent belief that p .

Taking the notion of occurrent belief as basic, the remaining two species of belief may be defined as complex *dispositions* to have occurrent beliefs in certain circumstances; thus each has variously embedded within it the Broad Schema’s formula for dispositional belief, *c obtains at $t > x$ believes₁ at t that p* (with ‘>’ symbolizing the subjunctive con-

ditional). What is essential to belief based on an ability to remember is that it be internally stored and at least in principle retrievable; the manner of retrieval (from merely considering whether p to undergoing deep hypnosis) is not essential. Hence (with s ranging over states of x),

- (B2) x believes₂ at t that p =df. $\neg(x$ believes₁ at t that p) . $(\exists s)(\exists c)$
 $[s$ obtains at t . s represents p . $(c$ obtains at $t > x$ believes₁ at
 t that p) . it is in virtue of s 's obtaining at t that $(c$ obtains at
 $t > x$ believes₁ at t that p)].

Here s is the inner state which determines the content of p and in virtue of which x is said to believe that p , while c constitutes the triggering conditions under which s would be activated and x would come to hold the occurrent belief that p . In "belief" based on an ability to discover, on the other hand, there is nothing corresponding to s ; instead, it is essential that the "believer" be in command of a reliable method for arriving at p . This suggests that

- (B3) x believes₃ at t that p =df. $\neg(x$ believes₁ at t that $p \vee x$
believes₂ at t that p) . $(\exists c)$ [it is within x 's power at t to bring
it about that c obtains at t . $(c$ obtains at $t > x$ believes₁ at
 t that p) . $(x$ considers at t whether $p > x$ believes₁ at t that [c
obtains at $t > x$ knows at t whether p)]].¹³

Here x 's command over a reliable method is understood to comprise the ability to bring about circumstances in which the indicated belief would follow, *and* his (consciously) believing that he has this ability (at least on those occasions when the issue becomes relevant). While (B2) and (B3) may not be perfectly congruent with our pretheoretical concepts of memory and discovery, they usefully identify salient intervals along the continuum of cognitive involvement.

Given the three types of "knowledge" whose belief-conditions have just been formulated, we are now in a position to define the corresponding concepts of omniscience. Let us say that omniscience _{k} is knowledge, *to degree k or less*, of all true propositions; that is,

- (O) x is omniscient _{k} at t =df. (p) [p is true $\supset (\exists j)(j \leq k . x$ knows _{j}
at t that p)].

There are a number of questions that could be raised regarding the concepts of omniscience₂ and omniscience₃, particularly the latter, with its reliance on a grade of cognitive involvement that may be only stipulatively acceptable as knowledge. These questions will be addressed in the last section of the paper. But first, we should determine whether there is anything to be gained from shifting to a nonoccurrent form of omniscience. I propose to do this by examining the difference such a shift could make to two notable problems concerning divine foreknowledge.

THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE AGENCY

The first problem I want to consider stems from the fact that prior planning for future actions appears to be stultified by advance knowledge of how the future will turn out. For example, so long as I know (or even just believe) that I will not go to the concert on Sunday – whether because it has been cancelled, or because I have another commitment elsewhere, or because a fortune-teller has predicted that I won't – I can hardly imagine myself pondering whether to go to the concert on Sunday. If this is so, then *complete* foreknowledge (of the sort possessed by God) precludes *all* prior planning, leaving divine providence to face the future without benefit of this important practical resource.

It is unclear whether the key doxastic principles which are alleged to generate this problem are supposed to express some sort of (psychological?) impossibility governing *all* agents, or merely a stricture which would be respected by all *rational* agents (insofar as they are rational). To ensure that the argument applies to God under either of these understandings of the problem, let us begin with the assumption that

- (1) God is a rational agent.

We can then state the first of the argument's two doxastic premises in its qualified form, i.e., conditional upon an agent's rationality; with the relevant "prior planning" identified more specifically as *deliberation*, this premise becomes

- (2) (x) (x is a rational agent \supset (p) [x foreknows whether p \supset \neg (x deliberates whether to bring it about that p)]).¹⁴

What (2) affirms is a principle that is more often expressed in the formula “one cannot deliberate over what one already knows is going to happen.” The idea is that, barring cognitive dysfunction, deliberation over p requires some antecedent uncertainty whether p will in fact come true, and this is inconsistent with the foreknowledge that p is (or is not) true. While acceptance of this principle has hardly been unanimous, it has exercised an irresistible intuitive appeal over many (and perhaps most) who have considered it.¹⁵

It follows from (2), by Universal Instantiation, that

- (3) God is a rational agent \supset (p) [God foreknows whether $p \supset$
 \neg (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p)],

and from (1) and (3), by Modus Ponens, that

- (4) (p) [God foreknows whether $p \supset \neg$ (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p)].

But if God is omniscient and sempiternal and propositions about the future have determinate truth-values (assumptions which underlie all the problems of divine foreknowledge), then

- (5) (p) (p is future \supset God foreknows whether p).

We can now draw the conclusion of the first (and most significant) part of the argument, namely,

- (6) (p) [p is future $\supset \neg$ (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p)],

which follows from (4) and (5) by Hypothetical Syllogism.

The second part of the argument begins with another doxastic premise, this one considerably less controversial than (2):

- (7) (x) (x is a rational agent \supset (p) [x knows that \neg (p is future)
 $\supset \neg$ (x deliberates whether to bring it about that p)]).

The idea here is that, once an event enters the present and begins to recede into the past, it is impossible for anyone either to bring it about or to prevent it; there is then no point in deliberating over it, and any minimally rational agent cognizant of its nonfuturity will not so deliber-

ate. Unless there is some compelling reason to think God an exception to this principle, Universal Instantiation can be applied to (7) to yield

- (8) God is a rational agent \supset (p) [God knows that \neg (p is future) \supset \neg (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p)].

Using Modus Ponens, (1) and (8) entail

- (9) (p) [God knows that \neg (p is future) \supset \neg (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p)].

But since God is omniscient,

- (10) (p) [\neg (p is future) \supset God knows that \neg (p is future)].

It now follows from (9) and (10) by Hypothetical Syllogism that

- (11) (p) [\neg (p is future) \supset \neg (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p)].

This brings the second part of the argument to a close.

To wrap up the argument, we have only to note that

- (12) (p) [p is future \vee \neg (p is future)].

Since these disjuncts are the antecedents of (6) and (11), we may infer by Constructive Dilemma the disjunction of their consequents; which, since these consequents are the same, may be simplified to

- (13) (p) \neg (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p)

or, to put the point more naturally,

- (14) \neg (\exists p) (God deliberates whether to bring it about that p).

This is a rather disappointing result for traditional theism – at least if deliberation is required for God to engage in such critical activities as creating a world and guiding its course so that His ultimate purposes are achieved.

Whether deliberation is indeed an essential element in divine agency is a vexed question (Descartes, for example, thought that it was not).¹⁶

Unfortunately, a negative answer to this question does not automatically resolve the issue in favor of traditional theism, since variations on the above argument, couched in terms of decision-making and intentional action rather than deliberation, can also be constructed. This requires transforming premise (2) into

(2)' (x) (x is a rational agent \supset (p) [x foreknows whether p \supset \neg (x decides to bring it about that p)])

or

(2)'' (x) (x is a rational agent \supset (p) [x foreknows whether p \supset \neg (x intentionally undertakes to bring it about that p)]),

rewriting premise (7) in similar fashion, and making appropriate adjustments to those lines in the argument which follow from these premises. The new versions of the argument will end in conclusions

(14)' $\neg(\exists p)$ (God decides to bring it about that p)

and

(14)'' $\neg(\exists p)$ (God intentionally undertakes to bring it about that p)

respectively.¹⁷ This last puts the traditional theist in an intolerable position: if (14) is injurious to divine agency, (14)'' is surely fatal. On the other hand, premises (2)' and (2)'' may appear somewhat shakier than premise (2). (Alvin Goldman, for example, endorses (2) while denying (2)').¹⁸ So while there is clearly trouble brewing here for traditional theism, it is unclear which version of the argument poses the strongest overall threat to divine agency. I have stated the argument in terms of deliberation only because this version stands the greatest chance of being sound.¹⁹

All of these conclusions (*contra* deliberation, decision-making, and intentional action) depend, of course, on step 2 of the argument, and this step is controversial. But both sides in the debate would agree that (2) (not to mention (2)' and (2)'') is simply false when it comes to knowledge based on anything other than occurrent beliefs. If I learn that the concert

has been cancelled but then forget what I learned or fail to attend to it, I can go ahead and deliberate whether to attend the concert just as surely as I could deliberate in a situation of total ignorance. It is only when a belief about the future is occurrent that it is capable of interfering with deliberation and other intentional preliminaries to action. Therefore the most that would be acceptable (though critics of the argument would say that even this is too much) is

- (2)* (x) (x is a rational agent \supset (p) [x foreknows₁ whether p \supset \neg (x deliberates whether to bring it about that p)]).

But then the argument can succeed only if

- (5)* (p) (p is future \supset God foreknows₁ whether p).

This premise, however, presupposes that God possesses omniscience₁. If this conception is rejected in favor of either omniscience₂ or omniscience₃, the argument fails.

While the dependence of (14) on (5)* is clear enough once stated, the significance of this fact has hardly been recognized in the debate over divine agency. Tomis Kapitan, for example, who has probably said as much as anyone in defense of the above argument(s), describes (without noting its theological significance) how a case of knowledge₂ could coexist with deliberation over what is known₂. Having argued that deliberation, and intentional agency in general, presuppose that the contemplated action is contingent relative to what the agent believes, he then adds:

The contingency need not be indexed by all that the agent in fact believes, only by what he *takes* himself to believe or know. . . . Since one can overlook one's commitments during the course of deliberation, it follows that . . . beliefs can be stratified with respect to retrievability, allowing that one can deliberate about what one already assumes one will not do, so long as this assumption is overridden by a more accessible set of internal beliefs against which contingency remains. While the latter class might be difficult to isolate, it appears indispensable in accounting for such cases of forgetful deliberators.²⁰

What exactly is involved in (or compatible with) *taking* oneself to believe or know something? This is not altogether clear; what *is* clear, however, is that Kapitan understands it in such a way that the range of

what a person takes himself to believe or know can be more restricted than what he actually believes or knows. This suggests the possibility that God might *be* omniscient (actually knowing, in some appropriate sense, all truths) while *taking* Himself to know only some of what He actually knows. My purpose in this paper is to make a case for conceptions of divine omniscience – namely, omniscience₂ and omniscience₃ – for which such a possibility makes sense.

I conclude that the adoption of either of these rival conceptions of omniscience – or of *any* variety of nonoccurrent omniscience – would be sufficient to dissolve the problem of divine agency.

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN FREEDOM

The next problem I want to discuss concerns an apparent conflict between omniscience and the existence of specifically *voluntary* agency (of the kind purportedly exercised by human beings as well as by God). The idea is that voluntary actions require alternative possibilities, but that such possibilities are logically incompatible with God's foreknowledge that they will not be actual. This problem has received its classic expression in recent years in a famous article by Nelson Pike.²¹

In the following version of the argument, which is more suitable to my present purposes than Pike's, p and q range over propositions, t and u over times, x over potential agents, and y over act-tokens. The first and pivotal premise of this argument is

- (1) (p) (t) (u) [(t ≤ u . God knows at t that p) ⊃ (∃q) (q ⊃ p . □_u q)].

The expression '□_u q' symbolizes the *temporal necessity* of a proposition q at a time u. Temporal (or, as it is also called, '*accidental*') necessity is the kind of necessity which, in its primary instance at least, attaches to a proposition about the past (or present) simply in virtue of its being about the past (or present). Suppose, for example, that Jones mows his lawn next Saturday. While this event still lies in the future, Jones presumably has the power to refrain from mowing on Saturday; I, too, may find that I have the power to prevent Jones from mowing,

and God surely has this power as well. But once Jones's mowing on Saturday is no longer future, it can no longer be prevented (by anyone). It is in this sense that the past is always (temporally) necessary, while the future alone may be (temporally) contingent. What (1) says, then, is that God's knowing a proposition *p* at a time *t* is sufficient for there being some further proposition which satisfies the following three conditions: (i) it is entailed by God's knowing at *t* that *p*; (ii) it entails *p*; and (iii) it is temporally necessary at *t* and all times later than *t*.

On what grounds do defenders of the argument assume that such a proposition is always available, and that (1) is therefore true? Consider as a candidate for *q*

(1.1) God knows at *t* that *p*.

This proposition satisfies condition (i) trivially; since knowledge entails truth, it also satisfies condition (ii). But the latter precludes it from satisfying (iii). Because knowledge entails truth, whether God's cognitions at *t* count as knowledge that *p* depends on whether *p* is true, and this depends in turn on whether the state of affairs expressed by *p* obtains. But if this state of affairs does not obtain until after *u*, it is not yet at *u* temporally necessary that God *knew* (and not just believed) that *p*. Thus (1.1) is what has been called a 'soft fact'. Sophisticated defenders of the argument recognize this, and proffer instead as a substitution for *q*

(1.2) God believes at *t* that *p*.

Since knowledge entails belief, (1.2) satisfies condition (i); and since classical theism understands God's cognitive excellence to comprise inerrancy as well as all-knowingness, divine belief entails truth and condition (ii) is also satisfied. But (1.2), unlike (1.1), appears to express a hard fact and thus to satisfy condition (iii) as well. A defender of the argument might bring out the contrast with (1.1) in the following way. If God knows at *t* that *p*, then clearly something happens at *t* which can be described as God's knowing that *p*; its being so described, however, depends on whether *p* is true. This is what makes (1.1) a soft fact. But (the defender might continue) it is not possible to analyze (1.2) in a similar fashion. If God knows at *t* that *p*, then something happens at

t which can be described as God's *believing* that p ; but its being so described does *not* appear to depend on whether p is true.²² Thus (1.2) qualifies as a hard fact, and so will be temporally necessary at t and all times later than t , as condition (iii) requires. (1.2), of course, is an obvious place for a critic of the argument to focus attention. The so-called "Ockhamist" strategy, introduced into the contemporary debate by Marilyn Adams and taken up by many others, involves denying that (1.2) is a hard fact after all, thus pre-empting condition (iii); William Alston has even argued that God's knowledge does not involve beliefs, so that (1.2) fails to satisfy condition (i).²³ Since the controversy over the status of (1.2) shows no signs of abating, it is of some interest whether the dispute can be avoided by shifting to a dispositional understanding of divine knowledge.

Accepting (1) for the sake of argument, the next premise is

$$(2) \quad (p) (u) [(\exists q) (q \supset p \cdot \Box_u q) \supset \Box_u p].$$

This premise asserts the closure of temporal necessity under entailment. With few exceptions, disputants on both sides have accepted this premise. If the past (understood to encompass only *hard* facts about the past) is settled, then any future event entailed by a past event must also be settled: it can no more be averted than can the past event which entails it. And if this is allowed, it follows by Hypothetical Syllogism from (1) and (2) that

$$(3) \quad (p) (t) (u) [(t \leq u \cdot \text{God knows at } t \text{ that } p) \supset \Box_u p].$$

Anything that God knows to be true will be temporally necessary at the time that He knows it and at all subsequent times.

Next, Exportation may be used to transform (3) into

$$(4) \quad (p) (t) (u) [t \leq u \supset (\text{God knows at } t \text{ that } p \supset \Box_u p)].$$

Now if (4) is true for *any* two times, it will be true in the special case where the two times are the same; so

$$(5) \quad (p) (t) [t \leq t \supset (\text{God knows at } t \text{ that } p \supset \Box_t p)].$$

Whenever (5) is true, so is

$$(6) \quad (p) [(t) (t \leq t) \supset (t) (\text{God knows at } t \text{ that } p \supset \Box_t p)].$$

But

$$(7) \quad (t) (t \leq t).$$

It then follows from (6) and (7) by Modus Ponens that

$$(8) \quad (p) (t) (\text{God knows at } t \text{ that } p \supset \Box_t p).$$

Using the same rule by which (6) was derived from (5), we now infer

$$(9) \quad (p) [(t) (\text{God knows at } t \text{ that } p) \supset (t) (\Box_t p)]$$

from (8). Any proposition always known by God is always temporally necessary.

We now factor into the argument the assumption that God is omniscient, and that omniscience characterizes God at every moment:

$$(10) \quad (p) [p \supset (t) (\text{God knows at } t \text{ that } p)].^{24}$$

It then follows by Hypothetical Syllogism from (9) and (10) that

$$(11) \quad (p) [p \supset (t) (\Box_t p)].$$

But if (11) is true for all p , it is true for all propositions of the form 'x does y': so

$$(12) \quad (x) (y) [x \text{ does } y \supset (t) \Box_t (x \text{ does } y)].$$

Furthermore, if the performance of a particular action is always temporally necessary, and so always unavoidable, such a performance cannot be free if freedom is understood in the libertarian sense which requires real alternative possibilities. So

$$(13) \quad (x) (y) [(t) \Box_t (x \text{ does } y) \supset \neg(x \text{ does } y \text{ freely})].$$

It then follows from (12) and (13) by Hypothetical Syllogism that

(14) (x) (y) [x does y \supset \neg (x does y freely)].

Thus the argument concludes with the denial of all libertarianly free actions, a conclusion which many theists have felt it important (theologically and otherwise) to avoid at all costs.²⁵

The question I wish to press with regard to this argument is whether the claim that (1.2) is a hard fact requires that belief be understood occurrently. If it does, (1.2) will satisfy condition (i) only on the standard view which treats God's knowledge as *occurrent* knowledge: knowledge₁. But if divine omniscience is satisfied by knowledge₂ or knowledge₃, it may involve only a *disposition* to hold an occurrent belief, and (1.2) (on the "occurrent belief" reading) will be unavailable as a substitution for q in premise (1) of the argument. In that case, the success of the argument will evidently depend on whether dispositional knowledge makes available some *other* candidate for q which satisfies conditions (i)–(iii). This is the question to which we must now turn.

Looking first at omniscience₂, let us consider as a candidate for q

(1.3) God is in state s at t,

where s is a state in virtue of which God can be said to believe₂ that p, a state which therefore meets the specifications given earlier in (B2). (Unlike standard cases of belief₂, s here *anticipates* rather than *memorializes* p.) (1.3) is entailed by God's knowledge₂ at t that p, and thus satisfies condition (i); since we are assuming for the sake of argument that (1.2) is hard, and (1.3) is surely hard if (1.2) is (there being no reason why God's past *states* should be any less hard than His past *beliefs*), this candidate would appear to satisfy condition (iii) as well. So if anything is to prevent (1.3) from fueling an argument for the incompatibility of free agency and omniscience₂ at least as strong as the argument for the incompatibility of free agency and omniscience₁ based on (1.2), it will have to be condition (ii). The following appears to offer the best hope that (1.3) will founder on condition (ii).

Any candidate for q must rest its claim to satisfaction of condition (ii) on an appropriate version of divine inerrancy. For an omniscient₁ being this is the requirement that p be entailed by the belief₁ that p;

for an omniscient₂ being the most natural requirement is that *p* also be entailed by the belief₂ that *p*. It thus appears, based on (B2), that the candidate qualified to satisfy condition (ii) is not (1.3) alone but the conjunction of (1.3) with

- (1.4) *s* is such that, were suitable circumstances (e.g., God's considering whether *p*) to obtain at *t*, God would believe₁ that *p*.

But now that (1.3) has been supplemented in such a way that condition (ii) is satisfied, it is necessary to review whether condition (iii) is satisfied. For the conjunction of (1.3) with (1.4) to be a hard fact, both its conjuncts must be hard facts. But are they? While (1.3) – the obtaining of *s* – has been accepted as a hard fact about *t*, perhaps (1.4) – *s*'s constituting the belief₂ that *p* (rather than constituting something else) – is a soft fact about *t*, a fact that is true if (and only if) *p* turns out later to be the case.

Is the claim that (1.4) is a soft fact at all plausible? I think it is certainly *more* plausible than the claim that (1.2) or (1.3) is a soft fact; but this is a far cry from saying that it is plausible *tout court*. A major obstacle to absolving omniscience₂ from the fatalistic implications of omniscience₁ is that knowledge₂ is most naturally construed as involving an inner state which “encodes” the believed₂ proposition. (It is perhaps not *necessary* to construe knowledge₂ this way, but no other construal is so favorable to the main advantage knowledge₂ is supposed to enjoy over knowledge₃, namely, that knowers₂, in virtue of being in state *s*, thereby possess (a nonstipulative/nonoccurrent form of) *the belief that p*.) To see why this understanding of knowledge₂ makes it difficult to regard (1.4) as a soft fact, consider a parallel case where *words* encode propositions. Suppose that Jones, returning home at *t*₂, fails to see the following note left for him at *t*₁: THE LAWN NEEDS MOWING. At *t*₃ (*t*₁ < *t*₂ < *t*₃) it is presumably a hard fact about *t*₂ that

- (1.3)* A particular scrap of paper *z* bearing the inscription THE LAWN NEEDS MOWING exists at *t*₂.

It is also a fact that

(1.4)* z is such that, had Jones read its inscription at t_2 , he would have entertained the idea that his lawn needs mowing.

Could (1.4)* possibly be a soft fact about t_2 relative to t_3 ? Surely not.²⁶ The truth of (1.4)* depends on such facts about t_2 as that Jones was (and had been since birth) a speaker of English, that his vision was unimpaired, that he was mentally alert, that he was not being controlled by a crazed neurophysiologist, and so on – all of which are *hard* facts about t_2 . (Once t_2 is past, nothing could happen later to bring it about that Jones was *not* an English-speaker at t_2 .) There is no evident reason why the same verdict should not be delivered in the case of (1.3) and (1.4), which appear to parallel (1.3)* and (1.4)* in all relevant respects. And even if this verdict were resisted for some reason, assessing a complex statement like (1.4) would require a rather fine understanding of the distinction between hard and soft facts, a distinction whose definition is one of the most vexed questions in the current debate. This is a real liability for omniscience₂ in the present context, since the whole point of appealing to dispositional omniscience is to see whether controversies which have arisen on the assumption of occurrent omniscience can be avoided. While knowledge₂ may leave some openings for Ockhamism which are not available in the case of knowledge₁, it is unlikely that these openings can be exploited in such a way that those who are not already inclined to find free agency compatible with omniscience₁ will be won over.²⁷

Consider, however, the second variety of dispositional omniscience: omniscience₃. If God merely knows₃ that p , without knowing₂ or knowing₁ that p , then there is neither an occurrent belief nor a correlative inner state to serve as a hard fact inconsistent with the temporal contingency of p . What other facts are available? There are certain hard facts about how divine knowledge₃ works – e.g., that God has a disposition to believe that p if p and a disposition to believe that not- p if not- p – but these facts would be no different if p were false, and so are useless to the argument for theological fatalism. There is also a counterfactual “belief-condition” which is entailed by God’s knowing₃ that p and which, on a natural construal of divine inerrancy, entails the truth of p – namely,

- (1.5) Were God to consider at t whether p , He would believe₁ that p .

But so long as God refrains from exercising His power to consider whether p or to bring about other circumstances in which He would have an occurrent belief that p , whether God's disposition at t is to be described as one in which He would believe that p or one in which He would believe that not- p depends on whether the future unfolds in such a way that p is true. That God would have believed that p if He had considered the matter at t is therefore surely a soft fact about t . In contrast to similar claims made on behalf of (1.2)–(1.4), I regard this claim about (1.5) as *uncontroversial*.²⁸

I conclude that omniscience₃ (including omniprescience₃) is compatible with the existence of agents who are free in a libertarian sense, whether or not current strategies (e.g., Ockhamism) succeed in showing omniscience₁ or omniscience₂ to be compatible with libertarian freedom. So if the doctrine of divine omniscience is satisfiable by omniscience₃, this doctrine is not jeopardized by the existence of free agents.²⁹

OMNISCIENCE AND THEISM

We have seen that by adopting alternative accounts of divine omniscience based on nonoccurrent knowledge we can avoid two of the problems that are widely thought to afflict the theistic conception of God. But the significance of this result remains to be established. After all, *any* problem with divine attributes can be solved by modifying the problematic attribute(s) – the question is whether we are left with a theologically adequate concept of God once this modification has been made. Two constraints on the theological adequacy of divine omniscience are particularly noteworthy. In the first place, knowledge is one of the traditional “great-making” properties, so that any acceptable account of divine omniscience must endow God with whatever epistemic virtues are necessary for Him to be a maximally great being. In the second place, omniscience is supposed to enable God to do things that are theo-

logically important – e.g., maintain providential control over the world – which He could not do (or do so well) if He were not omniscient. The possibility that a dispositional account of divine omniscience violates these two constraints gives rise to the two most important theological objections to that account, which I shall label the ‘Anselmian Objection’ and the ‘Utility Objection’ respectively.

The Anselmian Objection. This objection is straightforward enough. Any adequate concept of God will have to satisfy the Anselmian stricture that God is a being than which none greater can be conceived. But omniscience₁ can be conceived, and it is surely greater than omniscience₂ and omniscience₃. Therefore the proposed solutions to our two problems must be rejected out of hand; at the very least, relinquishing omniscience₁ entails a serious theological cost which counterbalances the apparent benefits of solving the two problems in the proposed manner.

This objection can be addressed on two different fronts.³⁰ On the first front, one can accept the Anselmian ideal, concede the superiority of occurrent omniscience over dispositional omniscience, and still deny that God is occurrently omniscient. This is because the *being* such that none greater can be conceived might not be a being each of whose *attributes* is such that none greater can be conceived. This latter being would presumably possess both occurrent omniscience and agency; but we have seen that there is a powerful argument purporting to show that occurrent omniscience and agency are not coinstantiable. If this argument is indeed sound, then the best we can hope for is either a being possessing occurrent omniscience but no agency, or a being possessing agency and merely dispositional omniscience. Since the latter is surely greater than the former, the claim that the greatest possible being is only dispositionally omniscient is certainly a defensible one.

Nevertheless, this first front may concede too much. Anselm seems to have assumed that the being than which none greater can be conceived *is* a being each of whose attributes is unexcellably great,³¹ and Leibniz contributed a notable argument to this effect.³² Whatever the independent merits of this position, it is a virtue of the second front in my response to the Anselmian Objection that it does not require us to forego them. In short, this second front accommodates the conjunction

of unexcellably great knowledge with free agency (human and divine) by simply denying that omniscience₂ and omniscience₃ really *are* “less great” than omniscience₁. Let us consider the two forms of dispositional omniscience separately.

The chief merit of omniscience₂ is that it is immune to the argument against omniscient agency. This argument allows for an agent to deliberate (decide, intend) with respect to *p* while believing that *p* so long as he doesn't *realize* he believes that *p*. It is because an omniscient₂ (but not an omniscient₁) knower is able to believe without realizing he believes that omniscient₂ (but not omniscient₁) agency is possible. But this makes it appear that the very advantage of omniscience₂ over omniscience₁ arises from a flaw in the knower₂. Is this appearance accurate? Perhaps the idea is that a *failure* or *lack* of realization is an obvious defect and so would be repugnant to the divine nature. But we shouldn't let the negative character of such terms mislead us. It is surely not repugnant to the divine nature that it *lacks* sin or *failed* to provide the Earth with two moons. A more substantial worry derives from the fact that the typical human case of deliberating over *p* in the face of a belief₂ that *p* is that of the “forgetful deliberator” cited earlier by Tomis Kapitan – a deliberator who, in overlooking what he believes₂, exhibits a very undivine deficiency. But is the forgetful deliberator the only example of someone who takes himself to believe less than he actually does? In particular, could a person deliberately (and not just inadvertently) disregard his doxastic commitments? It's not clear why this shouldn't be possible; and if it *is* possible, actually doing so for an adequate reason would not exhibit an obvious defect.³³ This being so, were a particular belief₁ to stultify an agent's capacity for intentional action, this would surely constitute an adequate reason for disregarding that belief, keeping it at a nonoccurrent level where it can do no harm. I conclude that the case against the comparative excellence of omniscience₂ has not been sustained; indeed, the omniscient₂ knower's control over the degree of his cognitive involvement might itself count as an excellence not possessed by an omniscient₁ knower.³⁴

As for omniscience₃, one concern may derive from the notion that knowledge₃ is only stipulatively knowledge; since it is not *really* knowledge (as the term ‘knowledge’ is ordinarily used), it is not even in the

running when it comes to defining the unexcellably best form of divine omniscience. But this earlier concern, far from being exacerbated by the Anselmian position, is actually undercut by it. The Anselmian ideal does not require that God possess an attribute (of *any* degree of excellence) which accords with the ordinary use of the English word 'knowledge'; its requirement is rather that God possess those attributes (whatever they might be) in virtue of which He is a being than which none greater can be conceived. If omniscience₃ can contribute to this ideal at least as well as omniscience₁, the fact that knowledge₃ is not "really" knowledge is simply irrelevant. The main reasons for supposing that omniscience₃ cannot make a contribution to this ideal comparable to that of omniscience₁ appear to be drawn from the particular circumstances of human knowledge. If my knowledge is dependent on my completing a train of reasoning, or looking out the window, or consulting a reference source, it is *fragile* knowledge, since I might be overcome by sleep, or lose my glasses, or find that I have misplaced the crucial volume of the encyclopaedia. There are internal and external threats to human knowledge₃ which prevent it from being secure. But obviously none of these threats applies to an omniscient₃ being who is also omnipotent, omnipresent, and everlasting. For such a being, all truths are "maximally accessible" inasmuch as His considering whether *p* is *sufficient* for His knowing₁ whether *p*. For what further conditions could remain to be satisfied? He "neither slumbers nor sleeps"; His epistemic success is independent of anything outside Himself; no information is beyond His reach in space or time; His cognitive faculties never fail. It is still open to the objector to insist that knowledge₁ is just intrinsically better than knowledge₃, but there is no reason why the defender of divine omniscience₃ need feel obliged to respond to this line.³⁵

In sum, the Anselmian Objection fails because it is not at all clear that the attribute of *consciously affirming all truths at all times* is really "greater" than the attribute of *being able to know whatever one wants to know whenever one wants to know it*. Indeed, one might wonder whether the latter isn't actually greater than having one's mind perpetually cluttered with unused information, since it achieves a comparable end with more economical means.

The Utility Objection. Nonoccurrent omniscience evades the problems of divine agency and human freedom so long as God's knowledge *remains* nonoccurrent; but as soon as He attempts to exercise His disposition to hold true beliefs₁ about the future, both problems arise with full force. It is a strange "solution" to these problems which permits God to possess a disposition to know while preventing Him from ever activating this disposition. Indeed, it is pointless; for so long as His dispositional omniscience remains unactivated, it must be completely useless to Him. In short, if the problems of divine agency and human freedom are genuine, God can neither exercise nor utilize His disposition to know the future; but if they are not genuine, there is no need for a dispositional alternative to omniscience₁ in the first place.

This objection is of course overstated. Not all cases of foreknowledge trigger problems with freedom or agency, since not all foreknowings have actions as their objects. Only dispositions to know future actions will raise problems when activated. If this still seems unacceptably restrictive, we must ask: Compared to what? Dispositional omniscience may appear rather disappointing compared to the traditional picture of an occurrently omniscient being whose foreknowledge neither limits His own agency nor precludes the freedom of others. But if the problems of divine agency and human freedom are genuine, such a being is impossible and thus unavailable as a standard of comparison. A fairer and more illuminating comparison would involve the being the theist is generally assumed to be left with once the force of these two problems is recognized, namely, one which lacks omniprescience in any form. *This* comparison puts the potential utility of omniscience₂ and omniscience₃ in proper perspective.

One strategy whereby dispositional omniscience could be put to theological use requires dividing God's providential reasoning into three stages. The first stage would involve purely hypothetical decision-making, yielding decisions of the form, "If condition C obtains, I (= God) will perform action A." Since the object of decision is the entire conditional, such decision-making would not presuppose knowledge that the antecedent is true (and thus would not presuppose *foreknowledge* of the antecedent where C is future). In the second stage of providential decision-making God would activate His dispositional knowledge

(including foreknowledge) to discover which conditionals have true antecedents. In the third stage God would decide what to do by drawing out the practical conclusions which follow from stages one and two. On this scheme foreknowledge makes an undeniably crucial contribution to divine agency; yet at no point does God occurrently foreknow what He will decide to do: stage-two foreknowledge₁ is directed selectively at the antecedents of stage-one decisions, and there is no reason why these should include God's own future decisions or actions.

Unfortunately, while it appears that the problem of divine agency, insofar as it contributes to the Utility Objection, can be largely dissolved by structuring divine decision-making in the suggested manner, the same cannot be said for the problem of human freedom; for the future actions of actual persons are surely among the antecedents of stage-one decisions known at stage two. Nevertheless, there is another strategy which makes considerable headway against both problems. Supposing that occurrent omniscience really is incompatible with libertarian freedom and the foreknower's own agency, there are presumably cases where the providential advantage of foreknowing a particular action is worth any loss of freedom or intentionality attendant upon foreknowing that action, and presumably other cases where the gain is not worth the loss. Now an occurrently omniscient being, faced with a trade-off between knowledge on the one hand and freedom and agency on the other, must always lose the freedom and agency, while a being which is neither occurrently nor dispositionally prescient must always lose the providential advantage of knowing future actions. But a dispositionally omniscient being has the flexibility to choose whichever side yields the greatest net gain over loss in those circumstances.³⁶

So dispositional omniscience is not bereft of possibilities for productive employment. If the problems of divine agency and human freedom are genuine, such possibilities may involve trade-offs; but at least a dispositionally omniscient being can weigh these trade-offs and opt for the most advantageous. It is instructive to compare divine omniscience with divine omnipotence in this respect. The latter is notoriously difficult to define, but one thing is clear: omnipotence endows God with wide-ranging *powers* to do things; it does not require that He *actually* do everything He has the power to do. A sufficient reason for His fail-

ing to do something He could do is that it would pre-empt someone's freedom, where this freedom (in those circumstances) is more important than what God could accomplish by abridging it. God is surely more, not less, great for exercising restraint in such cases; and what enables Him to calibrate His interventions this way is precisely that omnipotence renders Him *all-mighty* rather than *all-doing* (where the latter, of course, is not to be confused with *all-conserving*). A parallel treatment of God's cognitive excellence, under which He is *all-knowledgeable* rather than *all-knowing*, gives God the same admirable flexibility in balancing competing goods. As an added bonus, its reduction of dispositional omniscience to one of the powers constituting divine omnipotence allows for a more unified conception of the divine attributes.³⁷

* * *

The most favorable outcome for traditional theism would be the defeat of the two arguments purporting to demonstrate the incompatibility of divine omniprescience with divine agency and human freedom. I have taken no position in this essay on the prospects for defeat of either or both of these arguments.³⁸ What I *have* addressed is the consequence that is alleged to follow on the assumption that these arguments are successful. This alleged consequence is that divine omniprescience must be jettisoned if the other premises of the two arguments are to be retained. Theists are as likely as anyone else to acknowledge this consequence, since theists generally and unreflectively accept what I called at the beginning of this paper 'the standard view': that divine knowledge is purely occurrent in nature. My response to the standard view has been to develop a concept of *dispositional* omniscience which is compatible with intentional agency and libertarian freedom, and which leaves God better off than He would be on a simple denial of omniscience. The real advantage of dispositional omniscience is that it allows God to possess an impressive form of cognitive power (in which all true propositions have an accessibility for Him than which none greater can be conceived) while remaining selective about which true propositions to raise to a doxastic level at which problems of agency or libertarian freedom might result. Even if this isn't everything the theist would like to have, it is probably the most that is available pending a direct refutation of the

arguments for the incompatibility of omniscience with divine agency and human freedom.³⁹

NOTES

¹ One exception, which came to my attention after this paper was completed, is Douglas Drabkin's "The Nature of God's Love and Forgiveness," *Religious Studies* 29 (June 1993), pp. 231–38. Drabkin argues that God's responsiveness to human actions, particularly His forgiveness of human wrongdoing, is best understood on the supposition that God's knowledge may be dispositional as well as occurrent.

² Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1989), p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 36. The last phrase, "or to have it in mind," is surely a mistake: since the same phrase was used at the beginning of the sentence to define an *occurrent* belief, its use in describing the conditions under which dispositional belief would become occurrent reduces such dispositions to tautologies.

⁴ Alvin Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action* (Princeton: University Press, 1970), p. 87.

⁵ For Pollock, see, e.g., *Knowledge and Justification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 65: "a dispositional belief is one that can be made occurrent simply by considering the matter;" and for Foley, see "Inferential Justification and the Infinite Regress," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (October 1978), p. 312: "a person at a time *t* believes a proposition nonoccurrently if at *t* he is able to consider the proposition and he would occurrently believe it were he to consider it."

⁶ A more recent source representing this broader approach to dispositional belief is Robert Audi, "The Concept of Believing," *Personalist* 53 (Winter 1972), pp. 43–62.

⁷ While a conception of dispositional omniscience which requires dispositions to act in appropriate ways, but does not require dispositions to believe, is further from the standard view than the conception I develop in this paper (and further than what is necessary to solve the two problems I examine), it may still be a conception worth working out. I hope to do this in a separate paper. In the meantime, readers interested in the issue might look at A.A. Howsepian, "Middle Actions," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 34 (August 1993), pp. 13–28. Though Howsepian does not so much as mention dispositional belief, the scenario he sketches in this paper is highly suggestive. Having noted that foreknowledge and middle knowledge are widely thought to jeopardize human freedom but at the same time seem essential to any robust doctrine of divine providence, Howsepian proposes (p. 18) that it is nevertheless logically possible for God to lack the controversial knowledge but retain the robust providence: "Intuitively, the idea here is that although, by hypothesis . . . , God does not in fact possess foreknowledge of free human actions, his actions are identical to how he *would* act if he *were* to possess such foreknowledge." Actions meeting this criterion he calls

'middle actions.' But a God who "middle acts" may satisfy the Bain-Peirce-Ramsey-Braithwaite-Ryle account of dispositional belief; and if He always "middle acts" in an optimally suitable way (given the total facts about reality), He may be entitled on this account to dispositional omniscience. Thus Howsepian might be able to have his cake and eat it too.

⁸ E.g., Daniel Dennett accepts inferrable propositions as beliefs, Alvin Goldman rejects them as beliefs, and Joseph Margolis rejects them as beliefs while accepting them as knowledge. See Dennett, "Brain Writing and Mind Reading," in *Brainstorms* (Montgomery, Vt.: Bradford Books, 1978), p. 45; Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 202; and Margolis, "Knowledge, Belief, and Thought," *Ratio* 14 (June 1972), pp. 74–82.

⁹ John Anderson, *The Architecture of Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Joseph Margolis, "Problems Regarding the Ascription of Knowledge," *Personalist* 58 (January 1977), p. 8. Margolis is speaking in this passage of nonoccurrent knowledge based on inference.

¹¹ Alvin Goldman, "Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief," *Monist* 61 (October 1978), p. 527.

¹² In fact, God's situation is arguably such that His beliefs₃ may even be regarded as beliefs in a *nonstipulative* sense – or at least so I argue in my "Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

¹³ Since the analyses of belief₂ and belief₃ should accommodate some lapse of time between x's exercise of the power to bring about c, the obtaining of c, and x's occurrently believing that p, values for t must tolerate a certain amount of fuzziness.

¹⁴ That is, x does not deliberate *while* foreknowing. He might, of course, deliberate at some other time (e.g., prior to foreknowing).

¹⁵ Among those who have endorsed this principle are Carl Ginet, "Can the Will be Caused?" *Philosophical Review* 71 (January 1962), pp. 49–55; Richard Taylor, "Deliberation and Foreknowledge," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (January 1964), pp. 73–80; and Tomis Kapitan, "Deliberation and the Presumption of Open Alternatives," *Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (April 1986), pp. 230–51. I argue that the principle is unacceptable in "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (July 1993), pp. 396–416.

¹⁶ Descartes, *Meditations* IV. For a recent exchange on this issue, see Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Omniscience and Deliberation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984), pp. 226–36, and David Basinger, "Omniscience and Deliberation: A Response to Reichenbach," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 20 (1986), pp. 169–72. Reichenbach bases his case for nondeliberative divine agency on the fact that agency in general does not presuppose deliberation; Basinger, while agreeing that not all forms of agency require deliberation, thinks that at least some forms do require deliberation, including ones that it is important to ascribe to God.

¹⁷ For the former, see Richard R. La Croix, "Omniprescience and Divine Determin-

ism," *Religious Studies* 12 (Sept. 1976), pp. 365–81; for the latter, see Tomis Kapitan, "Action, Uncertainty, and Divine Impotence," *Analysis* 50 (March 1990), pp. 127–33, and Kapitan, "Agency and Omniscience," *Religious Studies* 27 (March 1991), pp. 105–121.

¹⁸ *A Theory of Human Action*, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

¹⁹ This is the version which I examine in "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *op. cit.* The argument couched in terms of intentional agency is criticized in my "Omniprescient Agency," *Religious Studies* 28 (September 1992), pp. 351–69.

²⁰ Tomis Kapitan, "Agency and Omniscience," *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²¹ Nelson Pike, "Divine Foreknowledge and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74 (January 1965), pp. 27–46.

²² Of course, God's *believing* that p may depend on p's being true (given divine inerrancy); but that belief's being *described* or *counting* as a belief that p does not depend on p's being true.

²³ Adams, "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?" *Philosophical Review* 76 (October 1967), pp. 492–503; Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs?" *Religious Studies* 22 (Sept./Dec. 1986), pp. 287–306.

²⁴ This assumption denies the "Boethian" conception of God as atemporal, a conception which some have touted as a means of evading the problem. Whether the problem can be evaded this easily is a matter of dispute, but irrelevant to my present purpose of establishing why *sempiternal* omniscience is thought incompatible with voluntary agency (the conclusion of Pike's argument).

²⁵ The version of the argument I employ here differs from the usual versions in that it is the temporal necessity of the *present* rather than the *past* which does the real work in the argument. This may encourage the misapprehension that the argument is endeavoring to refute libertarian freedom by appealing to the temporal necessity of actions at the time that they are performed. If the argument *were* doing this it would of course have to be rejected out of hand, since it is how matters stand *going into* an action that determines whether it is libertarianly free, and the temporal necessity of the action *at the time it is performed* has nothing to say about this. But this is not how the argument goes. It isn't God's knowing at t that S is A-ing at t that renders S's A-ing libertarianly unfree (though S's A-ing and God's knowledge thereof are both temporally necessary at t); it is rather the fact that God knows this not only at t (when S is A-ing) but at *all* times (see premise (10)), and that S's A-ing is therefore temporally necessary not only at t (when S is A-ing) but at *all* times (see steps (11) and (12)).

²⁶ Alvin Plantinga, in "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (July 1986), pp. 235–69, has provided an account of the hard-soft distinction under which virtually *any* fact could turn out to be soft. But I am trying here to respect the intuitions of the argument's defenders, and these would surely clash with those of Plantinga.

²⁷ Interestingly, William Hasker has already noted the role that dispositional belief might play in an argument for theological fatalism in his "Yes, God Has Beliefs!" *Religious Studies* 24 (Sept. 1988), pp. 385–94. Hasker argues here that even if Alston's

suggestion (*op. cit.*) that God lacks beliefs were acceptable, God would still have to have “d-beliefs”, where

S d-believes that $P =df$ S is in a dispositional state such that, if S were to declare his mind with regard to the proposition ‘P’, S would affirm that P.

He then comments (p. 386): “The application, I trust, is obvious. Whenever God knows that P, God will also d-believe that P. And now the Pikean argument can be restated with the substitution of d-beliefs for beliefs, and everything proceeds just as before.” But Hasker does not spell out just how the modified argument *does* proceed, and I think it is much less obvious than he supposes. The last couple of pages give my reasons for thinking he is ultimately right when it comes to belief₂; on the following page I explain why this result does not extend to belief₃.

²⁸ One way to confirm this judgment is to apply to (1.5) the influential “incompatibilist constraint,” designed to check intemperate claims to soft facthood on behalf of divine beliefs, which John Martin Fischer formulates in his “Freedom and Foreknowledge,” *Philosophical Review* 92 (January 1983), p. 76: “the only way in which God’s belief at t_1 about Jones at t_3 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_3 but a different belief (or not a belief at all) if Jones did not do X at t_3 .” But clearly whatever state of the Divine Mind grounds (1.5) *would* count as one belief₃ if Jones did X at t_3 but a different belief₃ if Jones did not do X at t_3 .

²⁹ I present a more extensive discussion of the issues from this section in my “Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?,” *op. cit.*

³⁰ A third response is simply to reject the Anselmian stricture. But I am concerned to show that a dispositional conception of divine omniscience is not this costly.

³¹ E.g., *Monologium*, ch. 16: “But it is obvious that whatever good thing the supreme Nature is, it is in the highest degree. It is, therefore, supreme Being, supreme Justness, supreme Wisdom, supreme Truth, . . .” In *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S.N. Deane, 2d ed. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), p. 66.

³² Leibniz, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, trans. A.G. Langley (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1896), Appendix 10, pp. 714–15.

³³ This possibility is defended in Michael Bratman, “Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context,” *Mind* 101 (January 1992), pp. 1–15.

³⁴ Not realizing that one has a (nonoccurrent) belief is clearly different from taking oneself *not* to have a (nonoccurrent) belief that one in fact has. The latter, which *would* be repugnant to divine perfection, is not needed to defuse the problem of divine agency.

³⁵ I elaborate on these credentials of omniscience₃ in my “Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?,” *op. cit.*

³⁶ The strategies summarized in the last two paragraphs are developed in more detail in my “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge,” *op. cit.* The same issue of *Faith and Philosophy* contains critiques of these strategies by Tomis Kapitan and David Basinger, along with my response, “Prescience and Providence: A Reply to My Critics.”

³⁷ Charles Taliaferro, in “Divine Cognitive Power,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985), pp. 133–40, argues that the traditional (presumably occurrent) notion of divine omniscience needs to be supplemented with that of “maximal cognitive power.” What I am exploring, in effect, is the idea that divine occurrent omniscience can be *replaced* with maximal cognitive power.

³⁸ In fact, neither seems to me to be unassailable. But since there is considerable sentiment in their favor, it is worth getting clear on just what would follow if they *were* to succeed.

³⁹ I am grateful to Greg Cavin and Steve Davis for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper, and to an anonymous referee for this journal whose suggestions led to a number of improvements.

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