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GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE, HUMAN FREEDOM,  
AND THE ASYMMETRY OF OPENNESS\*

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to defend the stance of theological compatibilism according to which the proposition that there exists essentially omniscient God is consistent with the claim that human beings are free in the sense of being able to do otherwise. I argue that the asymmetry constituted by our ability to influence the future and the lack of the analogous ability to affect the past—i.e., the asymmetry of ability—is a consequence of the asymmetry of openness between fixed past and open future. David Lewis (1979, 462) argues that the latter asymmetry should be interpreted in terms of the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence: if the future or the present were to be different, the past would be as it actually is, but not the other way around, i.e., if the past were to be different, the present and the future would also be different. Therefore, if we have decisive reasons to think that the asymmetry of openness does not apply to some types of facts about the past, then the pastness of these facts does not give us any reason to believe that we are unable now to do anything about them. However, plausible accounts of the nature and source of God's foreknowledge entail that God's past beliefs about our future acts are counterfactually dependent on the latter, and

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hence, there is no reason to believe that we have no choice now about any of God's past beliefs. That means that God's foreknowledge does not constitute any obstacle to human freedom.

In section 2, following Lewis (1979, 462), I define the asymmetry of openness between fixed past and open future as the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence. Next, I introduce a distinction between thin and thick facts about the past as distinction between facts which, respectively, are and are not counterfactually dependent on the future. I define the asymmetry of ability in terms of the asymmetry consisting in the ability to control thick facts about the future and the inability to control thick facts about the past. In section 3, I examine within my conceptual framework and reject the main argument for logical fatalism. Logical fatalism provides an important context for the discussion concerning the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human freedom. Section 4 presents and dismisses the argument for theological incompatibilism. I claim that the asymmetry of openness does not apply to God's past beliefs about the future, and consequently, they should be classified as thin facts about the past. Finally, in section 5, I argue that although my version of compatibilism is undoubtedly indebted to Ockhamism, it has a significant advantage over it and over Ockhamists' differentiation between soft and hard facts.

## 2. ASYMMETRY OF OPENNESS

We are universally convinced that there is a stark contrast between the past and the future. The contrast cannot be explained in terms of the metaphysical asymmetry of reality—we have good reasons to believe that the future is as real as the past, and the latter is as real as the present. My death is as real as my birth.<sup>1</sup> However, it seems that in some sense there is still some-

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout my paper, I assume eternalism, which is a very popular view in contemporary analytic metaphysics, shared by the majority of prominent philosophers writing on the problem of divine foreknowledge. According to eternalists, there is nothing metaphysically privileged about the present as there is nothing metaphysically distinctive about the place we call "here". Time is just another dimension, analogous to the familiar three spatial dimensions. The things and events spread out along these dimensions are equally real—they all exist (LOUX and CRISP 2017, 205–6). Of course, this does not imply that, e.g., my death exists *now*. It will exist in the future, but its futurity does not detract from its reality, just as the fact that my car is not *here*, but in the garage, does not imply that my car has a different ontological status compared to the things which are within my arm's reach at the moment. Eternalism, unlike rival views, is supported by the special theory of relativity, which does not privilege any one time over any other times. It also easily accounts for our

thing I can do about my death, whereas there is nothing I can do now about my birth, or about any past event for that matter. In what sense then can I do something about my death? Obviously, not in the sense of being able to become immortal. But it seems that it is within my power now to do something such that if I were to do it, I would die in a different way than it is actually going to happen. In contrast with it, I am unable now to do anything such that if I were to do it, then the past would have been different. It is not within my power to affect even such a negligible aspect of the past as the quantity of sweets that I consumed yesterday evening, let alone my birth. The past is closed, fixed, and beyond anyone's control, whereas the future is malleable and open at least to some extent.

The asymmetry between fixed past and open future—the asymmetry of openness, as I will call it following Lewis (1979, 462)—has been introduced above in terms of the asymmetrical limitation of the agent's ability at instant  $t$  to perform acts influencing events occurring at instants different than  $t$ . Let us refer to this limitation as the asymmetry of ability. Thus, to a first approximation, the asymmetry of ability can be characterized by the following pair of propositions:

- (1a) There is no agent  $S$  and there is no instant  $t$  such that  $S$  is able at  $t$  to do  $x$  such that if  $S$  were to do  $x$ , then our world would be different than it is at some instant *earlier* than  $t$ .
- (1b) There is agent  $S$  and instant  $t$  such that  $S$  is able at  $t$  to do  $x$  such that if  $S$  were to do  $x$ , then our world would be different than it is at some instant *later* than  $t$ .

However, the asymmetry of openness should not be defined in terms of the asymmetry of ability. The former has a wider scope and is of a more fundamental character, which was adequately captured by Lewis (1979, 455–56, 461–62). According to him, the asymmetry of openness is the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence:

- (2a) The way things are earlier does not counterfactually depend on the way things will be later, hence if the future or the present were to be different, the past would be as it actually is.

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claims about the future (LOUX and CRISP 2017, 214–15). However, arguing for eternalism lies outside the scope of this paper.

- (2b) The way things are later counterfactually depends on the way things were earlier, hence if the past were to be different, the present and the future would also be different.

The asymmetry of openness thus interpreted—the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence between the way things are earlier and the way things are later, or between the facts about the past and the facts about the future and the present—would be true of our physical world even if there existed no agent possessing any ability to act or no conscious being. Correspondingly, it is the asymmetry of openness which explains the asymmetry of ability. Counterfactual independence of facts about the past from facts about the future explains why we do not have the ability to control the past in the sense of (1a). If (2a) were not true, the truth of (1a) would be surprising and would call for an explanation which could not be grounded in the mere fact that it is the ability to influence past events—not present or future ones—which is at issue. Moreover, if it turned out that we are able to control some facts about the future—as we believe that this is actually the case—then we would have no reason whatsoever to deny that we are able to influence some facts about the past as well. On the other hand, the counterfactual dependence of later events on earlier events implies that a necessary condition of (1b)—that is, a necessary condition of the ability to influence the future—is satisfied.

Let us introduce a terminological convention according to which thin and thick facts about instant  $t$  are facts which, respectively, are and are not counterfactually dependent on the way things are at instants later than  $t$ . In virtue of our convention, if a fact is thin, then it is an exception to (2a), and as such breaks the asymmetry of openness. In accordance with what has been said in the previous paragraph, if there are thin facts, then there is no reason to claim that we have no choice about some facts about the past. The asymmetry of ability properly understood applies only to facts that conform to (2a), i.e., to thick facts:

- (1a\*) There is no agent  $S$  and there is no instant  $t$  such that  $S$  is able at  $t$  to do  $x$  such that if  $S$  were to do  $x$ , then some thick fact about some instant  $t'$  *earlier* than  $t$  would not obtain.
- (1b\*) There is agent  $S$  and instant  $t$  such that  $S$  is able at  $t$  to do  $x$  such that if  $S$  were to do  $x$ , then some thick fact about some instant  $t'$  *later* than  $t$  would not obtain.

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### 3. AGAINST LOGICAL FATALISM

Before proceeding to the issues concerning the relationship between God's omniscience and human freedom, I would like to concentrate on the argument for logical fatalism. That argument, even though commonly rejected, is frequently referred to in disputes about theological compatibilism. As I will try to show, when viewed from an appropriately general perspective, the fatalist's error is the same as the error of the theological incompatibilist.

Philosophers have been worried by the consequences of the principle of bivalence of classical logic for human freedom since Aristotle's day. According to this principle, each proposition possesses one and only one out of two logical values: it is either true or false. Suppose that the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  is true at  $t$ , i.e., at the present instant.<sup>2</sup> Wasn't it true also at each instant earlier than  $t$ ? It would be absurd to think that it was false at any time earlier than  $t$ . For the principle of bivalence precludes its having any third logical value, it should be concluded that the proposition has been true since eternity. Thus, the principle of bivalence leads to the principle of the eternity of truth:

- (3) For all propositions  $p$  and instants  $t$  if  $p$  is true at  $t$ , then  $p$  is true at any instant earlier than  $t$ .

Since the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  was true at all instants earlier than  $t$ , it was true also one thousand years ago, when Jones was not born yet. Because Jones has no power over the past, it seems that it is not within his power *not* to sit at  $t$ . Following Merricks (2009, 33), the main argument for logical fatalism can be reconstructed as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> One way of dealing with the problem of fatalism is to deny that propositions can be true or false *at times* (see, e.g., AYER 1963, 235–36; VAN INWAGEN 1983, 35–37). However, the majority of philosophers do not use this strategy. For instance, Trenton Merricks (2009, 34) writes, “after all, it certainly seems that some propositions—for example, *that humans exist*—were true long before I was born, and anything true *before* I was born must exist in time.” Alvin Plantinga (1986, 239–40) remarks that instead of saying of a proposition that it was true at a time one can say of a sentence that it expressed a certain proposition at a time, and that it expressed a truth at a time. That shows that nothing of importance with respect to the problem of logical fatalism hinges on whether it makes sense to say of a proposition that it was true at a time. As Plantinga (1986, 240) puts it, we do not have to share the scruples of those philosophers who deny that propositions can be true at times in order to accommodate them. I share his opinion, not the scruples in question.

- (4) Jones has no choice about the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  was true a thousand years ago.
- (5) Necessarily, if the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  was true a thousand years ago, then Jones sits at time  $t$ .

Therefore,

- (6) Jones has no choice about: Jones's sitting at time  $t$ .

The above argument is deductively valid. However, in virtue of the reasons adduced in section 2, if premise (4) is to be justified, it must be an instance of (1a\*). It means that the fact that the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  was true a thousand years ago must be not only a fact about the past but also a thick fact about the past. But this is not the case. The platitude that truth depends on the world, and not the other way around, implies that the asymmetry of openness does not apply to facts of the following type: proposition  $p$  to the effect that event  $e$  occurs at instant  $t > t'$  is true at instant  $t'$ . The facts of this type—contrary to (2a)—are counterfactually dependent on the way things will be later, that is, on whether event  $e$  will occur at  $t$ . If  $e$  were not to occur at  $t$ , then the way things are earlier—that is, that  $p$  is true at  $t'$ —would be different than it actually is, i.e.,  $p$  would be false. In particular, if Jones were not to sit at  $t$ , then the way things were one thousand years ago would have been different, because the proposition to the effect that Jones sits at  $t$  would have been false then. Therefore, the fact that the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  was true a thousand years ago is a thin fact, and consequently, premise (4) is not an instance of (1a\*).

The platitude that truth depends on the world, and not *vice versa*, is the cornerstone of Merricks's (2009, 35–45) reply to the fatalist. Yet, the critics of Merricks's account argue that the fatalist will not contest the platitude, but he will insist that it must be interpreted in light of the principle that truth at a time is made true by the world at that time (FISHER and TODD 2011, 113–14). On this account, the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  was true a thousand years ago in virtue of the way things were then, that is, one thousand years ago. Because the truthmaker for the proposition under consideration which existed one thousand years ago was—according to my nomenclature—a thick fact about the past, Jones has no control over it. For this reason, he has no control over the fact that the proposition that Jones sits at

$t$  was true a thousand years ago, and hence, he has no choice about his sitting at  $t$ .

The central problem faced by the fatalist is that their interpretation of the platitude is incorrect. Without repeating well-known arguments against the fatalist's principle that truth at a time is made true by the world at that time (see, e.g., HORWICH 1987, 28–33), I would like to call attention to a consequence of that principle that is especially undesirable in the context of this paper. By endorsing it, the fatalist is forced to deny that the asymmetry of openness in the sense of (2a) and (2b) is true for even most prosaic facts. Let us adopt a working assumption, *à la* Jan Łukasiewicz (1970, 122), that what makes the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  true at instant  $t' < t$  is event  $e$  which occurs at  $t'$  and which is the cause of Jones's sitting at  $t$ . The fatalist argues that Jones has no choice about his sitting at  $t$  because he has no choice about  $e$ 's occurring at  $t'$ . This presupposes the truth of the following backtracking counterfactual: If Jones were not to sit at  $t$ ,  $e$  would not occur at  $t'$ . Similarly for all other events: if a given event were not to occur, then no truthmaker for the proposition that this event occurs would obtain at any earlier instant. Thus, there would exist the perfect symmetry of counterfactual dependence between the past and the future—the symmetry of openness. This I take to be *a reductio* of fatalism. Let us note that there is a crucial difference between fatalists and their opponents in this regard. The traditional rejection of fatalism is based on the interpretation of the platitude that truth depends on the world according to which the truth at  $t'$  that event  $e^*$  occurs at  $t$  is made true by the world at  $t$ . The latter entails that the asymmetry of openness is broken merely with respect to a special class of facts—the facts that some propositions about the future were true in the past.

#### 4. IN DEFENSE OF THEOLOGICAL COMPATIBILISM

Omniscience is commonly attributed to God not only in Christian theology but also in Judaism and Islam. The proposition that God is omniscient analytically entails that God knows every truth and holds no false beliefs. Therefore, if Jones sits at  $t$ , God knows that Jones sits at  $t$ . However, God's epistemic perfection goes further than that. Not only is God omniscient but essentially so, which means that there is no possible world where God exists but he is not omniscient. Thus, for example, there is no possible world where God believes that Jones sits at  $t$  and Jones does not sit at  $t$ .

Let us suppose that there is everlasting—i.e., existing at each instant of time—God who is essentially omniscient in the sense explained above. Let us also assume that (3)—the principle of the eternity of truth—is true, and that Jones sits at  $t$ . Consequently, God believed that Jones would sit at  $t$  one thousand years ago; in fact, God has believed that since eternity. Is Jones able to do otherwise at  $t$ ? Searching for an answer to this question, let us consider what would have to be true if it were to be the case that Jones is able now to refrain from sitting at  $t$ . Arguably, Jones would have to possess one of the following abilities:<sup>3</sup> (A) ability to do something such that if Jones were to do it—that is, if he were to refrain from sitting at  $t$ —then God would have held a false belief about Jones’s act at  $t$  one thousand years ago. Certainly, Jones does not possess this ability. The proposition that he has it is inconsistent with our supposition that omniscience is God’s essential attribute—there is no possible world at which God holds a false belief. (B) Ability to do something such that if he were to do it, then God would not have existed one thousand years ago. Even if it is assumed that there is a possible world at which the proposition that God exists is false, it seems absurd to claim that God’s existence is dependent on human action.<sup>4</sup> (C) Ability to do something such that if he were to do it, then God would not have possessed the belief about Jones’s act at  $t$  that God had one thousand years ago. It appears that Jones does not have this ability due to the asymmetry of ability, or more precisely—due to (1a\*). Therefore, it seems that if there exists essentially omniscient God at the actual world, then no human act is free.

In accordance with my previous remarks, if the denial of ability (C) is to be justified, the fact consisting in God’s believing at  $t'$  that event  $e$  occurs at  $t > t'$  must be a thick fact, that is, the asymmetry of openness must be true of it. This, however, cannot be the case if God is essentially omniscient. God’s essential omniscience implies that if event  $e$  were not to occur at  $t$ , then God would not possess the same beliefs about the future as he has at  $t'$ ; in particular, God would not believe at  $t'$  that  $e$  occurs at  $t$ . Let us take a closer look at this issue by considering Leibniz’s (2009, 143–47, 370–73) theory. He believes the ideas of all possible worlds are in God’s mind. This is the knowledge of mere intelligence—the knowledge of everything that is possible.

<sup>3</sup> My reconstruction of the divine foreknowledge argument against human freedom is a slightly modified version of Nelson Pike’s classical argument (PIKE 1965, 31–35).

<sup>4</sup> This issue is more complicated in detail (ADAMS 1967, 495–99). However, in this paper, I choose a way of undermining theological incompatibilism which I take to be more promising and intuitive than arguing that Jones possesses the ability specified in (B).



Possessing the idea of a possible world  $w$  involves knowing which propositions are true at  $w$ , and hence, which facts would obtain if  $w$  were actualized. Without knowing this, God could not choose the best of all possible worlds. Thus, creating one of the possible worlds, God knows directly and *a priori* all facts which obtain, including all facts involving future events. If Jones were not to sit at  $t$ , then—under the supposition that Jones sits at  $t$  at the actual world—a different possible world would be actual, i.e., God would have chosen a different possible world to actualize than the one he actually selected. Because God would have known which possible world he had chosen, he would have believed that Jones would not sit at  $t$ . Thus, if Jones were to refrain from sitting at  $t$ , then God would have held a different belief about Jones's acts at  $t$  than the belief he possessed in the actual past. As we can see, the asymmetry of openness does not apply to God's past beliefs. They are thin facts about the past, and hence, we have no reason to believe that we have no choice about them.

So as to avoid any misunderstanding, let me emphasize that there is a consensus among philosophers that by positing the ability to control/ influence specific types of facts about the past, the opponent of logical fatalism and theological incompatibilism does not and should not posit any ability to causally—*via* some sort of interaction—affect the past. Instead, a different ability is at issue, namely, the ability to undertake actions such that if we were to perform them, then some propositions would have had a different logical value, and God would not have possessed some of the beliefs he in fact had in the past. By having this ability, we do not possess any ability to initiate any backward causal chains affecting the exemplifications of logical values by propositions in the past, or God's past beliefs, even though the latter counterfactually depend on our actions. Leibniz's theory allows us to illustrate the kind of control over God's beliefs which compatibilism requires, and which does not amount to any sort of controversial causal influence.

Let us also note that the discussion about the ability to *control/influence* the past does not concern the ability to *change* the past (PLANTINGA 1986, 244). Neither the past nor the future are alterable. Neither thin nor thick facts can be changed. Suppose that Jones will sit at some future instant  $t$ . It is clear that Jones is unable to do any  $x$  such that if he were to do  $x$ , then the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  would be true at any instant earlier than the instant of act  $x$ , and would be false at all instants identical to or later than the instant of  $x$ . Even the future is unchangeable in this sense. That does not

mean, of course, that Jones is unable to do any  $x$  such that if he were to perform  $x$ , then the proposition that Jones sits at  $t$  would be false at any instant earlier, simultaneous with, and later than the instant of act  $x$ .

### 5. ON OCKHAM'S WAY OUT

One of the traditional ways of arguing against logical fatalism and theological incompatibilism is to make a distinction between soft and hard facts, which dates back to the work of William of Ockham (1983). Ockhamists regard the facts that some propositions about the future were true in the past as soft facts about the past, i.e., as facts which are temporally relational and at least in part genuinely about the future. Unlike soft facts, hard facts about the past are over-and-done-with at some past time. Next, Ockhamists argue that proposition (1a) is true and justified only with respect to hard facts about the past, and there is no reason to believe that we are unable to control some soft facts about the past. As a result, Ockhamists insist that there is no reason to accept premise (4) since it is not an instance of (1a) correctly interpreted. They also argue that God's past beliefs about the future are soft facts about the past too, and therefore, we have no reason to claim that it is not within our power now to influence God's past beliefs about the future. The incompatibilist cannot justify his view by invoking the principle that the past is already fixed and beyond our control because that principle is unexceptionally true exclusively of hard facts about the past.

In light of the above, my distinction between thin and thick facts may seem to be identical with the differentiation between soft and hard facts, which is the hallmark of Ockhamism, and my solution to the problem of God's foreknowledge may appear to be Ockhamism in disguise. However, this is not necessarily the case. Trying to define or make more precise their distinction between soft and hard facts, Ockhamists refer to the set of paradigm instances of soft and hard facts about the past, which are appropriately represented by David Widerker's (1990, 463–64) examples:

(7) Paradigm examples of hard facts about the past, relative to January 2, 1985:

(A) Hitler attacked Russia in 1941.

(B) Smith uttered on January 1, 1985, the sentence "Jack will sign his contract on January 3, 1985".

(C) Smith believed on January 1, 1985, that Jack will sign his contract on January 3, 1985.

(8) Paradigm examples of soft facts about the past, relative to January 2, 1985:

(A') Hitler attacked Russia in 1941, 44 years *before* Jack's signing his contract on January 3, 1985.

(B') Smith uttered on January 1, 1985, the *true* sentence "Jack will sign his contract on January 3, 1985".

(C') Smith *correctly* believed on January 1, 1985, that Jack will sign his contract on January 3, 1985.

The adequacy of proposed definitions or criteria of soft and hard facthood are evaluated for conformity with the paradigm examples and the principle to the effect that no one is able to control any hard fact about the past. That leads to various problems. In particular, it transpires to be very difficult, if not impossible, to give such an account of soft facts as would classify God's past beliefs about the future as soft and yet be consistent with both the paradigm examples of hard facts about the past and the mentioned principle that no one has choice about any facts of the latter type. Despite Ockham's hopes, Ockhamism does not seem to be an effective strategy of dealing with theological incompatibilism.

The indicated problems can be illustrated with the help of a well-known example given by Alvin Plantinga (1986, 254). Let us assume that God's past beliefs about the future are soft facts, and consequently, that the principle according to which we are unable to control the past does not rule out that we are able to do things such that, if we were to do them, God's past beliefs about the future would have been different than they actually were. Suppose that a colony of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday. Suppose also that Paul will not mow his lawn this afternoon, although he is able to do it, and if he were to do it, the colony of ants would be destroyed. Imagine now that God's intention is to preserve the colony, and God allowed the ants to move in because he knew in advance that Paul will not mow his lawn this afternoon. But if God had foreknown that Paul would cut the grass this afternoon, he would have prevented the colony from moving in. Under all these suppositions, it must be admitted that Paul is able to do something such that if he were to do it (i.e., if he were to mow his lawn this afternoon), then the colony of ants would not have moved into his yard last Saturday. The problem is that the fact that that colony moved into Paul's

yard last Saturday is certainly a hard fact about the past, or it must be classified as hard if the facts described in (7) are to be the paradigm examples of hard facts about the past. But if the fact under consideration is hard, but nonetheless Paul is able to mow his lawn, then Paul has the power over hard facts about the past. For this reason, the Ockhamist cannot claim that the intuitive principle that the past is fixed and beyond anyone's control is preserved within the framework of their account in the form of the principle that no one has control over hard facts about the past. Thus, the whole intellectual gymnastics aiming at drawing the line of demarcation between soft and hard facts about the past, and showing that God's past beliefs about the future are soft, appears pointless. The motivation behind it was in the first place to demonstrate that theological compatibilism does not ascribe to agents any ability to influence the past that would be inconsistent with the principle, properly understood, that the past is beyond our control.<sup>5</sup>

On my account, the distinction between thick and thin facts about the past is the distinction between facts which, respectively, conform and do not conform to the asymmetry of openness. Whether facts described in (7)—that is, the paradigm examples of Ockhamists' hard facts—are thick depends on the nature of the world we live in. There is no reason to expect that facts of the type specified in (7) are thick regardless of whether essentially omniscient God acting on the basis of his foreknowledge exists at our actual world. Since in my view the principle that the past is beyond anyone's control is interpreted in terms of (1a\*)—that is, as the principle to the effect that we have no choice about thick facts about the past—admitting the ability to influence some hard facts about the past does not pose a problem for my account as long as these hard facts are thin.

However, is my version of compatibilism consistent with the criticism I levelled against logical fatalism in section 3? There I argued that the universal breaking of the asymmetry of openness reduces fatalism to absurdity. At the same time, my version of theological compatibilism seems to entail a

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<sup>5</sup> J. M. Fischer (2016, 124–26) objects that Plantinga is not entitled to assume that Paul has the power to mow his lawn in the circumstances in question. However it may be, I refer to Plantinga's example in order to show that the Ockhamist, who thinks that divine foreknowledge does not deprive Paul of his ability to cut the grass because God's past beliefs are soft facts about the past, still faces a serious problem. What if God not only does know the future, but also acts on the basis of his foreknowledge? If the Ockhamist is to stick to compatibilism also under the latter supposition, then they are committed to assert that Paul is able to do something such that if he were to do it, then some hard fact about the past would be different. Thus, I interpret Plantinga's example as an internal challenge to a specific version of Ockhamism.

similar consequence if conjoined with the assumption that God carries out multiple plans for numerous entities in this world. Under this supposition, various hard facts about the past—like the fact that a colony of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday—turns out to be thin. So should not compatibilism be rejected on the same ground as fatalism? No, it should not. Compatibilism as such does not imply the breaking of the asymmetry of openness. The latter is a consequence of the hypothesis that there exists omniscient God who frequently intervenes in the world on the basis of his foreknowledge. The incompatibilist also should agree that in the circumstances, if Jones were to mow his lawn this afternoon, the colony of carpenter ants would not have moved into Paul's yard last Saturday, i.e., that the fact under discussion—the fact about the colony—is thin. Her disagreement with the compatibilist does not concern this issue, but it is about whether in the circumstances, Jones is able to mow his lawn this afternoon.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In order to tackle the problems generated by divine foreknowledge, the fundamental task is to establish why, in general, we are unable to influence the past. My answer refers to the asymmetry of openness—the asymmetry between fixed past and open future—interpreted in terms of the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence: the past is counterfactually independent of the future, that is, if the future were to be different, the past would be as it actually is. But there are some exceptions. Even theological incompatibilists should admit that if I were to do otherwise, God would have had a different belief in the past, i.e., he would have correctly believed that I would do otherwise. Therefore, they should admit that that part of the past which is constituted by God's past beliefs is counterfactually dependent on the future—the asymmetry of openness does not apply to that component of the past. But then, according to the view I am defending in this paper, we do not have any reason grounded in God's foreknowledge to claim that we are unable to do otherwise. The same considerations justify the rejection of logical fatalism. Propositions about future contingencies were true in the past, but this does not pose a threat to human freedom because these facts about the past are counterfactually dependent on the future. In the context of the problems of divine foreknowledge and logical fatalism, the crucial distinction

among past facts is a differentiation between facts which break and those which conform to the asymmetry of openness.

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#### GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE, HUMAN FREEDOM, AND THE ASYMMETRY OF OPENNESS

##### Summary

The paper defends a compatibilist solution to the problem of the relationship between divine and human freedom. It is argued that the asymmetry of ability constituted by our ability to foreknowledge influence the future and our inability to control the past results from the asymmetry of openness between fixed past and open future interpreted in terms of the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence. Therefore, if the asymmetry of openness is not true of some types of facts, then we may be able to control them even if they are facts about the past. It turns out that widely shared accounts of the nature and source of God's foreknowledge entail that the

asymmetry of openness does not apply to God's past beliefs about future contingencies. Thus, it is unjustified to claim that we are unable to now do anything such that, if we were to do it, God's past beliefs would have been different.

**Keywords:** God's foreknowledge; ability to do otherwise; compatibilism; fatalism; asymmetry of openness; Ockhamism.

## BOSKA PRZEDWIEDZA, LUDZKA WOLNOŚĆ I ASYMETRIA OTWARTOŚCI

### Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest kompatybilistycznemu rozwiązaniu problemu relacji między Boską przedwiedzą a ludzką wolnością. W tekście argumentuje się, że asymetria polegająca na naszej zdolności do wpływu na przyszłość i braku analogicznej zdolności do kontroli przeszłości jest rezultatem asymetrii otwartości między przyszłością a przeszłością interpretowanej w kategoriach asymetrii kontrfaktycznej zależności. W konsekwencji, jeśli asymetria otwartości nie stosuje się do pewnych typów faktów, wówczas możemy posiadać zdolność do kontroli tych faktów, nawet jeśli są to fakty dotyczące przeszłości. Okazuje się, że z najbardziej rozpowszechnionych ujęć natury i genezy Boskiej przedwiedzy wynika, iż asymetria otwartości nie stosuje się do posiadanych przez Boga w przeszłości przekonania na temat przygodnych zdarzeń przyszłych. Zatem nieuzasadnionym pozostaje twierdzenie, że jesteśmy pozbawieni zdolności do uczynienia teraz czegoś takiego, że jeśli byśmy to zrobili, to Boskie przekonania byłyby w przeszłości inne niż były.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Boska przedwiedza; zdolność do alternatywnego działania; kompatybilizm; fatalizm; asymetria otwartości; ockhamizm.