

# Omniscience and the Problem of Foreknowledge and Freedom

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## Section I: Omniscience

One of the traditional attributes that theism ascribes to God is omniscience. To be omniscient is to be all knowing (you're not omniscient but you probably knew that much). But as I'm sure you are beginning to suspect, philosophers are generally not content to leave well enough alone, and so they are not likely to rest easy with so straightforward a definition.

We can make progress in thinking about omniscience by thinking about what sorts of knowledge there are. Probably the most common form of knowledge discussed, and the easiest to get a good grip on, is propositional knowledge. Propositional knowledge is knowledge of propositions. Fine, you say, but what's a proposition? A proposition is the meaning of a declarative sentence. We use declarative sentences to express propositions; sentences are vehicles to communicate propositions.

A pedestrian example of propositional knowledge is your knowledge that George W. Bush is the current President of the United States. What you know is that the proposition "George W. Bush is the current President of the United States" is true. This gives us some insight to an important necessary condition of propositional knowledge: truth. No one can know a false proposition. One can think one knows a proposition that turns out to be false (indeed, people do it all the time) but a false proposition can't be an object of genuine knowledge.

There are two other components of the traditional conception of propositional knowledge. In order of a person S to have knowledge of a given proposition K, (i) K must be true, (ii) S must believe K, and (iii) S must be justified in believing K. It isn't crucial for our purposes to go into these second and third conditions of knowledge very much, but I should mention that the relevant conception of belief here is not much different from "conviction." It comes in degrees and is consistent with a very high level of confidence. So one can feel perfectly sure about the truth of K and still be said to "believe" it in the relevant sense. So the belief necessary for knowledge is not what we might call 'mere belief.'

The justification condition is there because one can't truly be said to know a true proposition that one believes if there is no good connection between the proposition's truth and the person's belief. One who believes that the card she has just blindly drawn from a fair deck of cards is the King of Hearts does not know this even if she should happen to be right. If she has cheated and has other evidence (i.e., she placed this card at a certain place in the deck and made sure she drew from that place) or if she genuinely has a sixth sense about cards and she is never

wrong when making such claims (of course, I don't believe there is any such sense but that's neither here nor there for this example), then she might have knowledge of the card before she sees it. But if she has just made a 'lucky guess' then she has merely true belief and not knowledge. The justification need not be in the form of an argument or even of other beliefs. Perceptual beliefs, for example, are typically taken to have experiential grounds or justification: when I see the apple on my desk and thereby come to believe that there is an apple there, my belief is justified by my perceptual experience of seeing the apple.

So when theists say God is all knowing, they should be understood as meaning at least that God has all propositional knowledge—i.e., that God knows all true propositions. But they are generally thought to mean more. Among God's perfections is the impossibility that God should ever be in error; so God not only knows all true propositions but God doesn't believe any proposition that's false. We can see how this fits in with omniscience by considering that if God knows all true propositions, and if God is perfectly rational and hence consistent in what God believes, then God won't believe any false propositions. Suppose that God believes *F* and that *F* is a false proposition. If *F* is a false proposition, then not-*F* is a true proposition and if God is omniscient, then God believes not-*F*. So God believes both *F* and not-*F*. But that would violate God's perfect rationality. So, if we think of God as knowing all true propositions and as perfectly rational, then God be wrong in what God believes.

Still, there is more to God's cognitive perfection than knowing every true proposition and not believing anything false, Suppose that I read the most complete biography of the life of baseball great Buck O'Neill that could possibly be written. Indeed, this biography describes every aspect of O'Neill's life, thought, and character. Suppose this book is perfectly accurate and that I have total recall of its contents. I know, literally, all there is to know about Buck. But never having had the honor of meeting the man, I can't say that I know (or knew) him. I have perfect propositional knowledge but I lack what philosophers call "knowledge by acquaintance." This second sort of knowledge is a bit tougher to define but pretty easy to get the basic idea of. The object of knowledge by acquaintance is a person or at least an entity; the object of propositional knowledge is a proposition. If God is omniscient, then surely God knows more than our biographies; God knows *us* too.

Omniscience can then be tentatively defined as follows:

*X* is omniscient iff *X* knows all true propositions and *X* is acquainted with all things.

This definition is tempting but some have said that it isn't strong enough to accurately describe the cognitive state of the most perfect being. Imagine two people who we'll call "Moe" and "Curly." Moe has the ability to directly know all true propositions (ignore for a moment knowledge by acquaintance) and Moe tells Curly everything he knows. So Curly knows all true propositions too. Now it is clear that Moe is the cognitively more powerful agent, but our definition above doesn't seem to capture that. Moe's virtue is that his knowledge is direct; Curly's is not.

Call having the ability to know directly every true proposition combined with perfect rationality "maximal cognitive power." Call maximal cognitive power that produces knowledge

of all true propositions “fully-exercised maximal cognitive power.” Then we may define omniscience as follows:

X is omniscient iff X has fully-exercised maximal cognitive power.

## **Section II: The Problem of Omniscience and Human Freedom**

Suppose that I make the following bold prediction:

P: You will have coffee with your breakfast tomorrow.

Now you might be interested in thwarting me and so refrain from having your morning coffee. Then my predication, P, will be false. Notice though, that while your refraining from having coffee is what makes the prediction I made today false, it seems as though what I said was false when I said it. After all, when you come to me late tomorrow morning, smug smile on your face, you’ll say something like, “You aren’t so smart after all; what you said yesterday was wrong. I didn’t have coffee with breakfast today.”

On the other hand, we might suppose that tomorrow morning you forget all about my prediction and you do as is your custom: you have a hot cup of coffee with your Wheaties. Now what you have done makes what I said yesterday true. Notice that in neither of these cases is the issue how I could *know* that you’d have coffee with breakfast. What matters for now is that we’d naturally say that in the first case I had said something false and in the second I’d said something true. Knowledge isn’t the issue right now.

Now if God knows all true propositions, then it would stand to reason that God not only knows all past-tense propositions (e.g., “The Allies won World War II”) and present-tense propositions (e.g., “George W. Bush is President of the United States), but he knows all future-tensed propositions too (e.g., The next presidential election will take place in 2008).

Let’s think about proposition P above. If it is true that you will have coffee with breakfast tomorrow, then God now knows this. On the other hand, if P is false, God know knows that P is. For the purpose of illustration, let’s suppose that P is true and that tomorrow is November 22nd, 2008.

### **Section II. 1: A First, Clearly Unsuccessful Argument**

Since omniscience has traditionally been understood to entail complete knowledge of the past, present, and future, then God now knows P. Furthermore, God has known this—like God’s known everything else—from eternity. If God now knows P then the following is true:

A: God knew on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you would have coffee with your breakfast.

We saw above that truth is a necessary condition of knowledge. That means that any statement of the form “If S knows p, then p” is not only true, but it is necessarily true. Now it might be thought that we have here the seeds of an argument that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom. For consider this argument, which we will dub ‘The Unsuccessful Argument for the Incompatibility of Omniscience and Freedom’ or ‘Unsuccessful’ for short):

- P1: Necessarily, if God knew on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast, then you will have coffee with your breakfast.
- P2. God knew on February 18th 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast.
- C. Therefore, necessarily, on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast.

If it is now necessary that you will have coffee with your breakfast on that day, then you certainly lack freedom with respect to having coffee then. For if something is necessary, it is unchangeable or unavoidable. But if your having coffee on that date is now unavoidable (again, we are assuming that you are reading this before the date in question), then you aren’t free with respect to it.

### *The Problem with Unsuccessful*

So what is wrong with Unsuccessful? The short answer is that it involves what philosophers call a “modal fallacy.” The longer and more helpful answer requires spelling out what that means.

Stripped of its particular content, Unsuccessful is an instance of this type of reasoning:

- P1. Necessarily, if P, then Q.
- P2. P
- C. Therefore, necessarily, Q.

It turns out that this variety of reasoning is fallacious (that means that there are instances in which consistent substitutions for P and Q give us true premises and a false conclusion), and by definition no fallacious argument is valid. Philosophers call this a ‘modal’ fallacy because it is a fallacy that pertains to the concepts of possibility and necessity (which are ‘modal’ notions). To see an example in which this kind of reasoning can take two true premises and yet yield a false conclusion consider this:

- P1. Necessarily, if John is a bachelor, John is unmarried.
- P2. John is a bachelor.
- C. Therefore, necessarily, John is unmarried.

Although this argument might sound fine initially, a little reflection shows us that the conclusion may be false, even when the premises are true. But let's first see that there is no problem with the premises themselves. P1 is true given the definition of 'bachelor.' Because being unmarried is a conceptually necessary condition for being a bachelor, it is not only true that if John is a bachelor, John is unmarried, but it is necessarily true as well. There are, as we say, no possible worlds at which John is a bachelor and yet is married. P2 we can stipulate for the sake of our case. Now given these premises, does it follow that, necessarily, John is a bachelor? No, it does not. The way to see this is to consider what is being said when one claims "Necessarily, John is a bachelor." Of course, it follows that John is a bachelor; but we would get that from the mere conclusion "John is a bachelor."

What does the prefix 'necessarily' add? Quite a lot. "Necessarily, P" can be reasonably rendered: "The following is true and couldn't possibly have been otherwise: P." In other words, it asserts that P is a necessary truth. But now consider John, your average, run-of-the-mill bachelor. Although P1 and P2 together entail that he is currently unmarried, do they give us reason to believe that his being unmarried is necessarily true—that he can't marry and couldn't have been other than unmarried? No, of course it entails no such thing. P1 and P2 are perfectly consistent with the claim that John will marry next week. So the above argument about John would be fine if C were to be

C.\* Therefore, John is unmarried.

So why are we tempted by C in the first place? After all, on first blush the argument seems fine. The answer is that there is indeed some necessity involved in our inference about John. But rather than the necessity's being *in the conclusion*, the proper place for the necessity is *in the relationship between the premises and the conclusion*. As with any logically valid argument, the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion of the amended John argument: if it is necessary that (if John is a bachelor, then John is unmarried), and if John is in fact a bachelor, then it necessarily follows that John is a bachelor. But the fact (and this is the important point here) that the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises does not mean that the conclusion is, itself, necessarily true—that it is true at all possible worlds. What is true at all possible worlds is the connection between the premises and the conclusion: at all worlds at which the premises are true, the conclusion is too.

Okay, armed with all this, we can now see why Unsuccessful is, well, unsuccessful. Unsuccessful is an instance of the same modal fallacy that the original John argument is an instance of. From the fact that it is necessary that if God knows P, then P, together with the fact that God knows that P, we may validly infer "P" but not "Necessarily, P." So if God knows that you'll have coffee with breakfast on the given day, and if God's knowing that implies that you will have coffee with breakfast that day, then it certainly follows that you will have coffee with breakfast. But it doesn't follow that, necessarily, you will have coffee with breakfast. Remember, to say that is necessary is to say that there are no possible worlds at which you exist and you don't have coffee with breakfast on November 22, 2008.

You might be thinking that it's enough to cause trouble for my free will that we can draw the valid inference that you will have coffee; after all, if God knows that I'm going to have it,

and if we can use that to form an sound argument that logically entails that I will have it, doesn't that show I lack the freedom to avoid it?

No, it is not. For its being necessary (in the metaphysical sense of that term of interest here) that you perform an action pretty directly entails that you weren't free with respect to it. After all, if it is necessary then it holds for all possible situations in which you exist; it is hence entirely unavoidable for you. But the weaker conclusion that you will have the coffee carries no such direct ties to unavoidability.

Of course, these reflections don't show the compatibility of omniscience and freedom. And it might be that the vague feeling that the fact that your having coffee for breakfast validly follows from God's foreknowing it is cause for concern can lead to the formulation of a better argument for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and freedom. Nevertheless, that Unsuccessful earns its name as an attempt to show this incompatibility is about as clear and uncontroversial as things get in philosophy.

## ***Section II.2 Principles Needed for a Stronger Argument***

While Unsuccessful might have turned out to be a rather weak argument, it has considerably stronger progeny. In order to properly develop them, however, we need to be patient and begin with a little philosophical TLC. So let's begin by considering a couple key metaphysical principles and the relationship they bear to our topic at hand.

### **Principle 1: The Principle of the Necessity of the Past**

First, a definition that is probably unnecessary but in the interest of covering our bases will be included. A necessarily true proposition is a proposition that is true at all possible worlds; a proposition that could not possibly have been false. A necessarily false proposition is a proposition that is false at all possible worlds; a proposition that could not possibly have been true. A necessary proposition is a proposition that is either necessarily true or necessarily false. Not even God can alter the truth of a necessary proposition. (Let this go for now: when we talk about omnipotence in a week or so, we'll consider why philosophers and theologians have traditionally thought that God's omnipotence did not include the ability to alter necessary propositions.)

In addition to necessary propositions, there are other propositions that philosophers have thought not even God could change; these are propositions about the past. Call any proposition about the past a fixed proposition. God could easily have prevented it from being true (assuming that it is true) that:

PA: On October 1, 2008 you had coffee with your breakfast.

But as things go, let us suppose, God didn't. PA is not only true but it is fixed. So given that PA is fixed, there is nothing that God can now do about it. Oh sure, He can erase from your mind all memories of breakfast that day, and remove all the chemical clues your having had coffee that

morning might have left. But not even God can now make it the case that you didn't have coffee on that morning if you did indeed have coffee then.

Thus, the Principle of the Necessity of the Past:

**PNP: What is past is fixed and not in anyone's power to change.**

### **Principle 2: The Fixedness of the Consequences of the Fixed**

Let's think about the basic logical inference form modus ponens. What it says is that if the truth of p guarantees the truth of q, and if p is true, then q is true as well. Here's what modus ponens looks like as you'd find it in a logic text:

P1. If p, q.

P2. p.

C. Therefore, q.

Now suppose we know that the truth of p guarantees the truth of q. Suppose also that p is a true proposition about the past. Then we know both that there is a necessary connection between p and q (that is, that necessarily, if p is true, then q is true too) and that p is fixed. This implies, then, that q is fixed.

Here's an example. George Washington was the first president of the United States. This is a true proposition about the past and hence is fixed; there is nothing that anyone can now do to change the fact that George Washington was the first president. But now consider this: If George Washington was the first president, then George W. Bush was not the first president. This is surely a logical truth: if George Washington is the first president, then any subsequent president is not the first president. But if it is fixed that George Washington is the first president, and if it is necessary that if George Washington was the first, then George W. Bush is not the first, then it is fixed that George W. Bush is not the first; and this was fixed from the time George Washington took the oath of office. Even before George W. Bush became president, it was not in God's power to make him the first president. George Washington had already that position and not even God could now take it away from him. So not only is the past fixed, but any truth logically entailed by a past truth is itself fixed.

More technically:

Principle of the Fixedness of the Consequences of the Fixed:

**PFCF: If (i) p is fixed and hence not in anyone's power to change and (ii) necessarily (if p then q), then q is fixed and hence not in anyone's power to change.**

PFCF says, in effect, that if something is fixed and if it is necessary that if the first thing holds, then so does a second thing, then that second thing is fixed too.

### ***Section II.3 The Argument***

We are now in a position to string together the argument from divine foreknowledge to the lack of human freedom. In a nutshell, here's the idea. God's knowing in the past what you will do in the future is itself fixed and unchangeable. But God's foreknowing what you will do in the future entails that you will do that thing. (That is, necessarily, if God knows at time  $t_1$  that you will do X at some future time  $t_2$ , then you will do X at  $t_2$ .) So it would appear that your future act is fixed and so unchangeable from the time God first foreknew what you were going to do. But no free action is fixed and unchangeable before it takes place. Therefore, the action that God foreknows is not one that can be free. This is a loose way of stating the argument. Here is a much more careful form.

1. God knew on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you would have coffee with your breakfast. (premise)
2. PNP: What is past is fixed and not in anyone's power to change. (premise)
3. Therefore, God's knowing on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you would see have coffee with your breakfast is fixed and not in anyone's power to change. (from 1 and 2)
4. Necessarily, if God knew on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast, then on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast. (premise)
5. PFCF: If (i) p is fixed and not in anyone's power to change, and if (ii) necessarily (if p then q), then q is fixed and not in anyone's power to change. (premise)
6. Therefore, your having coffee with your breakfast on November 22, 2008 is fixed and not in anyone's power to change. (3, 4, 5)
7. Necessarily, if A is now fixed and not in anyone's power to change, then no one is free with respect to A. (premise)
8. Therefore, you are not free with respect to having coffee with your breakfast on November 22, 2008. (6, 7)

Now of course there is nothing special about the example I've chosen. If God exists and has foreknowledge, then an argument like this can be run for any action anyone has ever done. Therefore, no action has ever been free.

### ***Section II.4 Some responses***

In this argument, steps 3, 6, and 8 are conclusions. The argument is valid, so if it is to be resisted, one will have to deny a premise. Here are the possibilities:

- a. deny foreknowledge or divine temporality (step 1)
- b. deny the Principle of the Necessity of the Past (step 2)
- c. deny that knowledge implies truth. (step 4)
- d. deny the Principle of the Fixedness of the Consequences of the Fixed (step 5)
- e. deny incompatibilist freedom (step 7)

There is much that could be said about each of (a)—(e). In the interests of space and time, though, I'm going to concentrate what follows on (a), (b), (d), and (e).

#### *(a) Denying Foreknowledge or Divine Temporality*

I group these objections to the argument together because each involves denying the truth of the first premise.

*Denying Foreknowledge*

This ‘solution’ is really capitulation; it’s a philosopher’s way of saying ‘uncle.’ If the theist gives up the claim that God has foreknowledge, then there is no conflict between human freedom and what God knows. This doesn’t show that there is any flaw in the initial argument (the point of the argument was to defend the claim that God’s having foreknowledge is not consistent with human freedom); rather it just denies one of the two claims alleged to be inconsistent.

One might worry that denying foreknowledge entails denying omniscience, and denying that latter would seem to be giving up a lot. After all, if God lacks foreknowledge then there are things that God doesn’t know; and if there are things God doesn’t know, then God is presumably not omniscient, right?

This last move has been denied. We saw above that omniscience requires knowing all true propositions. So if there are true propositions that are unknown by God, then God is not omniscient. Everyone will, I think, agree with that.

The person who denies foreknowledge will likely argue that the reason God doesn’t know what free creatures will do in the future is that before the agent acts, there is simply no fact of the matter as to what she will do. Take, for example, Smith’s possible free decision to go to Kansas City this weekend. The person who adopts (a) will claim that before this weekend it may have been probable that Smith would go (or probable that Smith not go) but it wasn’t yet true to say that Smith would go (or stay). When on Saturday morning Smith gets in his car and makes the drive it becomes true that Smith goes to KC this weekend. The proposition “Smith goes to KC on the weekend of the 11th of March 2005” becomes true when Smith arrives in KC and not before.

So before Smith goes to KC, God doesn’t know that Smith will go. But (and here is the point the foe of foreknowledge will insist upon) before Smith goes to KC there is nothing for God to know. Omniscience requires that God knows all true propositions. Yet before the weekend in question, it is simply not true or false that Smith will freely go to KC. And if it isn’t true, it can’t be known. Omniscience doesn’t require knowing what is in principle unknowable.

One way to see this is to stress the parallel between omniscience and omnipotence. God’s omnipotence requires that God can do everything that it is logically possible for the greatest possible being to do. Omniscience requires knowing all that it is possible to know; propositions about the future are not true or false and so they are not possible to know. Therefore, odd though it seems, one can deny foreknowledge while affirming omniscience.

### *Denying Divine Temporality*

This entire argument is couched in terms of God knowing things at times. While many of the other claims are conditional in nature or more abstract general truths, step one of the argument flat out asserts that God has knowledge of a proposition at a time. But as we've seen from our class discussion of the attribute of eternity, the advocate of timelessness will deny that God knows anything at any time. Therefore, she'll maintain that step one is just straightforwardly false.

To get a more general sense of why timelessness is supposed to help, consider this example: suppose I see you mowing your lawn and hence I come to know that you are now mowing. If it is true that I now know you are mowing, then it might seem that, in some sense, you must be mowing; my knowledge of what you are doing requires that you are mowing. But it would be perverse to say that because it is necessary that "if I know you are mowing, then you are mowing," my knowledge infringes on your free will. And the reason this would be perverse is not hard to see: the fact that you are mowing is what explains my knowledge, not the other way around. In other words, yes, there is a relationship of determination between my knowledge and your mowing but the direction of the determination is from your mowing to my knowing and not the other way around.

What does this point have to do with timelessness? Well, the advocate of atemporality insists that God's knowledge of our free actions is in principle just like my knowledge of your mowing. God knows what he does by timelessly observing what goes on as it happens; he quite literally doesn't foreknow. His knowledge of what I will do tomorrow comes from his timelessly observing me do what I then do. Since his knowledge doesn't come temporally prior to my action, there is no question of its being consistent with my freedom.

Although there is something intuitively compelling about this, it is not clear that the timelessness solution gets the theist out of the problem. For it would seem that the sentences and independent clauses that attribute temporal attributes to God can be reworded to avoid this result. For example, step one of the argument is:

1. God knew on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast.

The trick is to find some way of asserting this that will make it true on the timelessness advocate's construal of God's relationship to time. Although convoluted, it is not clear that the following reformulation won't do the trick:

- 1\*. On February 18, 2003, if someone had uttered a sentence that expresses the proposition "God timelessly knows that on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast" that person would have said something true.

As I said, this is way convoluted. But it seems to manage to say something that the atemporalist will have to agree with (assuming, that is, that it turns out to be true that you have coffee with breakfast on that date) and that would seem to raise the old problem.

(Note, of course, that other premises will have to be altered too and made to read like this revision of step one.) I am not hereby concluding that the timelessness doesn't solve the omniscience/freedom problem but only that it isn't obvious that it does.

*(b) Denying the Principle of the Necessity of the Past*

We won't really be able to do justice to this here, but perhaps the most popular way of avoiding the conclusion that humans lack free will even though God is temporal and has foreknowledge is to deny a full-blown version of the PNP.

Suppose that, as it turns out, it is 10 am and that I will eat lunch at noon today. Then here is a fact about the past:

1: At 9 am it was true that I would eat lunch in exactly three hours.

Here's another fact about the past (let us suppose):

2: At 7 am I ate a bowl of Wheaties.

Now (2) is a clear example of a fact about the past (remember, it is 10 am now); it's also a prime example of a fact about the past that is fixed and unchangeable.

What about (1)? (For the time being put aside the question of foreknowledge.) There is a sense in which it is proposition about the past—it seems to be making a claim about an earlier time. Suppose that I will, as it turns out, eat lunch at noon. Do we have any reason for thinking that (1) is a proposition over which I have no control at 10 am? It sure seems not; it seems that at 10 am I have the ability to make (1) false if I so choose.

Inspired by medieval philosopher William of Ockham (yes, the guy with the well-known razor), many contemporary philosophers insist that we can distinguish facts like (2) which are wholly about the past and (1) which are partially about the future. Facts like (2) are called 'hard facts' about the past; facts like (1) are called 'soft facts' about the past.

The idea, then, is that the PNP should be amended in such a way as to allow for this distinction and to allow that soft facts, facts only *in part* about the past, be facts over which agents have some control. Consider again what PNP says:

PNP: What is past is fixed and not in anyone's power to change.

If PF1 is considered a fact about the past (as it is partially), then PNP will imply that it isn't in my power at 10 a.m. not to eat lunch at noon. But that doesn't seem right. The kinds of cases that made the PNP seem plausible were of the PF2 sort—if I ate Wheaties at 7 a.m., there is nothing I can do now that it is 10 a.m. to alter that fact.

So we need a principle that it is hard, rather than soft, facts about that past that are fixed. To this end, we should revise the PNP to read as follows:

PNP\*: Hard facts are fixed and not in anyone's power to change.

The defender of the compatibility of omniscience and freedom will now insist that the first premise of the above argument (God knew on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast) is a soft fact about the past since it is a fact partially about the future. Thus, the version of the PNP that she is committed to (viz., the PNP\*) doesn't give the result that God's foreknowledge of our future free actions are hard facts and hence not in anyone's power to change.

There is an awful lot more to be said about this (there is an entire philosophical literature on the hard fact/soft fact distinction and the extent to which it really helps here). (For instance, while it might be clear that the fact that I will have coffee with my breakfast on some future morning is a soft fact, is God's *now* believing that I will then have coffee a soft fact?) But this is as much as we have time for here. Suffice it to say that it is by no means clear that this distinction is sufficient to make our problem go away.

*(c) Deny that Knowledge Requires Truth*

Few things in philosophy are uncontroversial, but the claim that knowledge requires truth is pretty close. If belief aims to represent the world accurately (and surely it does; that would seem to be the point in having beliefs in the first place), then we need the idea of beliefs that actually get it right and that do so by being formed in the right way. Knowledge is just that concept.

Actually, the assumption that knowledge requires truth can be discarded and the problem will remain. We can rewrite the entire argument not in terms of what God knows but instead in terms of what God believes. Since God is infallible, God's beliefs can never be false. For if God believes *p*, then *p* is true. So we can rewrite the first premise as

1\*\*. God believed on February 18, 2003 that on November 22, 2008 you will have coffee with your breakfast.

Now assuming God has unerring maximal cognitive power, we can be confident that it was true in February two years ago that you will have coffee with breakfast tomorrow, and the argument can then be recast in terms of divine belief instead of divine knowledge.

*(d) Denying the Fixedness of the Consequences of the Fixed*

It's awfully hard to see how to deny this step. That a proposition is fixed, and that it's being fixed entails another proposition is fixed, surely implies that the second proposition is fixed too. If there is something that is not in anyone's power to change, and if, of logical necessity, the first thing's happening means the second thing will happen too, then surely seems that there is no way that the second thing could fail to be fixed and not in anyone's power to change.

*(e) Denying incompatibilist freedom*

Finally, the defender of omniscience and freedom might want to insist that step 7 of the argument is wrong because it presupposes incompatibilism. Incompatibilism is the view that

being free regarding an action requires that, in that circumstance, the person has the ability to do that action and the ability to refrain from it. There can't be anything prior to that action that completely removes the possibility of one or the other alternatives.

This is a big kettle of fish that we don't have time to fry, but there is a long philosophical tradition that would have you believe that freedom of action requires no such thing. Performing an action freely crucially involves doing that action because it is what you want to do rather than your being forced into it. So if you are considering whether to do A or not, and you think hard about it, weigh the pros and cons, and decide that all things considered you do want to do A, and so you do A, then, it is said, you do A freely. Freedom is doing something not because you have to but because you want to.

Now if that is right, then being free doesn't require having genuine alternatives. Even if God knows that you will do A, and even if that means that your doing A is now unchangeable and inevitable, as long as you do it because it is what you want to do, then you do it freely. So freedom and foreknowledge are compatible because freedom doesn't require genuine alternative courses of action.