

Aquinas' compatibilism

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1 The argument for incompatibilism

Recall the following argument for the incompatibility of free will and foreknowledge:

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| 1. Necessarily, if God believes at some time t that p , then p . | Infallibility |
| 2. If p is a truth about the past, then no one is free to make it the case that not- p . | Past |
| 3. Necessarily, if no one is free with respect to p , and necessarily, if p , then q , then no one is free with respect to q . | Transfer |
| 4. God believed in 1900 that ACT will happen. | Foreknowledge |
| 5. No one is free with respect to the fact that God believed in 1900 that ACT will happen. | (2,4) |
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| C. No one is free with respect to the fact that ACT will happen. | (1,3,5) |

(As with the consequence argument, we will use ACT as a name for some arbitrary future action of yours, that happens at some specified time – say, January 1, 2015.)

As we saw, the Ockhamist compatibilist claims that the inference from (2) and (4) to (5) is invalid, whereas the Molinist, by contrast, rejects Transfer.

Today we will be interested in a different response. This is to deny Foreknowledge, on the grounds that God is outside of time, and hence did not know things in the past.

2 Aquinas on God and time

Aquinas' view was that God is eternal — outside of time — rather than sempiternal — existing at all times. God's life does not happen in succession, as ours does, but is 'simultaneously whole.'

Two reasons for holding this view: the immutability of God, and the perfection of God.

This view also promises to resolve the apparent incompatibility between foreknowledge and free will. This is what Aquinas says about God's knowledge of future contingent things, like human free actions:

“God knows all contingent things not only as they are in their causes, but also as each one of them actually is in itself. . . . God knows contingent things not successively . . . but simultaneously. The reason is because his knowledge is measured by eternity . . . and eternity, being simultaneously whole, comprises all time. . . . Hence, all things that are in time are present to God from eternity, not only because he has the essences of things present with him, as some say, but because his glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality. Hence it is manifest that contingent things are infallibly known by God, inasmuch as they are subject to the divine sight in their presentiality; and yet they are future contingent things in relation to their own causes.”

Some difficulties with understanding the relationship between God and time. The idea that x and y can be simultaneously present to God, even though y is later than x .

One might still wonder about exactly how God knows these things. Aquinas often says things like, “God's knowledge is the cause of things” and “God knows things other than himself insofar as he is the cause of them.” On one reading, these claims are puzzling, since if God knows our actions by causing them, they don't seem to be free actions; and then God's knowledge would again be incompatible with free will. I will set these questions to the side – they are taken up in the excerpt from Stump's book *Aquinas*.

3 Objections to this view

Let's consider some objections to the idea that God's being outside of time helps to block our argument for the incompatibility of free will and foreknowledge.

3.1 *The core argument revised*

One argument against Aquinas' solution is the argument can be reformulated so as to avoid it:

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| 1. Necessarily, if God timelessly believes that p , then p . | Revised Infallibility |
| 2. If p is a timeless truth, then no one is free to make it the case that not- p . | Timelessness |
| 3. Necessarily, if no one is free with respect to p , and necessarily, if p , then q , then no one is free with respect to q . | Transfer |
| 4. God timelessly believes that ACT will happen. | Timeless omniscience |
| 5. No one is free with respect to the fact that God believed in 1900 that ACT will happen. | (2,4) |
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| C. No one is free with respect to the fact that ACT will happen. | (1,3,5) |

Even if Aquinas could deny (4) of the original argument, he clearly cannot deny premise (4) of this argument.

Is premise (2) of this argument as plausible as the corresponding premise of the original argument? Can one defend premise (2) of the new argument by saying that I can't have free choice with respect to something if God *already* knows it in its presentiality?

3.2 *Plantinga's objection*

Plantinga offers a different way of revising the core argument to avoid Aquinas' way out. Consider this revision of the argument for incompatibilism:

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| 1. Necessarily, if God believes that p , then p . | Infallibility |
| 2. If p is a truth about the past, then no one is free to make it the case that not- p . | Past |
| 3. Necessarily, if no one is free with respect to p , and necessarily, if p , then q , then no one is free with respect to q . | Transfer |
| 4. In 1900, it was true that God timelessly believed that ACT will happen. | Past Timeless K |
| 5. No one is free with respect to the fact that God believed in 1900 that ACT will happen. | (2,4) |
| <hr/> | |
| C. No one is free with respect to the fact that ACT will happen. | (1,3,5) |

It looks difficult for Aquinas to reject (4); and this time premise (2) is unchanged from the original argument. So it looks like Aquinas has to block the inference from (2) and (4) to (5). But this is the inference of the original argument which the Ockhamist rejects. So it looks like Aquinas' solution only works if the Ockhamist solution works; and the Ockhamist solution works without the supposition that God is outside of time. So the claim that God is outside of time is irrelevant to the question of the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge.

Again the issue appears to come down to the question of whether it makes more sense to say that we are now free with respect to what God timelessly believes than with respect to what God believed in 1900.

3.3 *The problem of prophecy*

Suppose that in 1900 God, or a divinely inspired prophet, decided to write down what you would be doing on 1/1/2015. Then we can put together a version of the above argument which replaces mention of God believing something in 1900 with God, or the prophet, writing something down in 1900. Even if God is outside of time, prophets certainly are not. So the idea that God is outside of time is powerless to block this version of the argument.

How should Aquinas reply?