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## Book Review: The Dilemma Of Freedom And Foreknowledge

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge.* **Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski.** New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Pp. viii and 215. \$32.50.

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In many respects, this essay is an exemplary piece of philosophical theology. The topic it addresses — the alleged incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom — is one of the most important, and most perplexing, in the history of philosophy. Zagzebski, who writes as well as anyone working in the field today, does an excellent job of describing the problem with exceptional clarity. Her critique of others' solutions, and her presentation of her own, are equally sharp and thoughtful. Whether or not one ends up agreeing with her, one can hardly help but benefit from her stimulating discussion.

Though Zagzebski shows great care in formulating various versions of arguments purporting to show an incompatibility between freedom and foreknowledge, a simplified presentation of one of these variations will suffice to illustrate the alleged inconsistency, the range of responses Zagzebski describes, and her reactions to those responses.

According to incompatibilists (i.e., those contending that foreknowledge and freedom are incompatible), it follows from God's omniscience that he knows all truths. But, since there were truths in the past about what his creatures would do in the future, it follows that God knew such truths. What's past, however, is accidentally necessary (i.e., out of our control), for our power extends only into the future, not into the past. So God's past beliefs about future actions are now accidentally necessary. But there's no possibility of God's beliefs being mistaken. The fact that he believed that I will do something, then, entails (and, indeed, is logically equivalent to) the fact that I will do that thing. But accidental necessity is closed under entailment (or logical equivalence). Therefore, since God's past belief that I would perform a certain action is accidentally necessary, it follows that it is also accidentally necessary that I perform that action. But an action which is accidentally necessary — which is out of my control — is not one which is free, at least not in the libertarian sense of freedom theists typically endorse. God's foreknowledge, then, is incompatible with human freedom.

Such an argument for theological fatalism is very similar to one for logical fatalism, which argues from the mere fact that there were in the past truths

about how we would act in the future to the conclusion that all such actions are unfree. Though acknowledging the similarity, Zagzebski contends that the argument for logical fatalism is actually much weaker. Our intuition that the past is beyond our control, she maintains, is an intuition concerning the fixity of past events or states of affairs, not an intuition concerning propositions. Hence, it is much more plausible to think of God's past beliefs as being accidentally necessary than it is to think of past truths about the future being so (pp. 24-28).

Zagzebski's reasoning here, which depends in part on the assumption that propositions cannot change truth value over time, is sure to strike many readers as questionable. But I doubt that much hinges on our ranking such arguments in degree of difficulty. Zagzebski is surely right in suggesting that, if a plausible solution to the threat of theological fatalism can be found, logical fatalism will not pose additional problems.

Zagzebski contends that, among the various solutions to the problem of theological fatalism which have been proposed, there are three major types which deserve serious consideration. *Boethian solutions* deny that God is in time, and thus deny that he has beliefs at moments of time. If it is false to say that God believed in the past that I would do such-and-such tomorrow, then the fact that past events are accidentally necessary gives us no reason to think that God's beliefs are accidentally necessary, and so the incompatibilist argument never gets off the ground. *Ockhamist solutions* concede that God exists in time and had beliefs in the past about our future actions, but deny that those beliefs are accidentally necessary, for Ockhamists see us as having either causal or (more typically, according to Zagzebski) counterfactual power over God's past beliefs. *Molinist solutions*, on the other hand, view (or at least can view) God as temporal and concede that his past beliefs are accidentally necessary, but deny that accidental necessity is closed under either entailment or logical equivalence.

Zagzebski's delineation of these three positions is not perfect. (For example, since Molinists would agree with the claim that we have counterfactual power over God's past beliefs, all Molinists would count as Ockhamists as defined by Zagzebski; Molinism would be but a brand of Ockhamism, not an alternative to it.) Nevertheless, problems of this sort are rare. In general, Zagzebski's presentation of the three types of solution is admirable for its clarity and accuracy.

Equally clear are the reasons why Zagzebski deems none of these three avenues a total success. Though critical of the attempts to show that the Boethian picture of an eternal God is incoherent or implausible from a Christian standpoint, she maintains that the argument for theological fatalism can be transposed into an eternalist key. Such an argument, which Zagzebski dubs the Timeless Knowledge Dilemma, suggests that the realm of eternity is at

least as fixed as the realm of the past; hence, God's eternal beliefs concerning our actions render those actions just as unfree as his past beliefs would have rendered them (pp. 60-63). As Zagzebski sees it, there are solutions to this dilemma, but we need to go beyond the Boethian picture to find them. Ockhamist solutions receive an even harsher verdict from Zagzebski, who feels that our initial intuition that all past beliefs are accidentally necessary retains its potency despite the various ad hoc machinations of contemporary Ockhamists. "God's past beliefs," she says on p. 84, "seem just like spilled milk," and we have no more reason to countenance our having causal or counterfactual power over the former than over the latter. The Molinist solutions are also dismissed by Zagzebski. She agrees with the Molinist that there are some true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, and thus labels herself a moderate regarding middle knowledge. But she denies that there are enough such counterfactuals which are true logically prior to God's creative activity to provide God with complete foreknowledge, and thus contends that the complete Molinist picture which would justify our denying that accidental necessity is closed under entailment is an untenable one (pp. 144-150).

My summary here does scant justice to the detailed presentation offered in the text. Many of these details — e.g., her discussion of the artificiality of many Ockhamist renderings of the distinction between hard and soft facts (pp. 74-78) — are truly fascinating, and the level of argumentation is generally quite high. But there are occasional slips. This is especially evident in her presentation (on pp. 110-115) of three arguments against power entailment principles, principles which (in essence) claim that "power to make true" is closed under entailment or equivalence. Though I have also previously argued (in this journal and elsewhere) for the falsity of these principles, Zagzebski's arguments struck me as unimpressive. Take, for example, her first argument. Central to this argument is the claim that there are certain necessary propositions which God had the power either to bring about or to not bring about. As an example of such a proposition, Zagzebski offers

(11) If there is a Fall, God sends his Son to redeem the world.

Commenting on (11), Zagzebski says:

God has the power to bring about (11) and the power to bring about the negation of (11). But couldn't God decide to send a redeemer in *any* circumstance in which there was a fall? Doesn't God have the power to decide that no matter what happened, if there was a fall, there would be a redemption? If so, it would be the case that (11) is a necessary truth, true in all possible worlds. And it would be a necessary truth precisely because God decided in a certain way, a way in which he could have decided differently. (p. 111)

Such an argument is clearly fallacious. If God could have decided differently, then there are possible worlds in which he does decide differently, and in

those worlds (11) is false. So (11) is not a necessary truth. God's decision to send a redeemer in any circumstances in which there is a fall guarantees only the *truth* of (11), not its *necessity*.

Blatant blunders of this sort are rare in Zagzebski's criticisms. Still, there is much with which her opponents might reasonably take issue. Especially shaky (at least from my admittedly biased perspective) is Zagzebski's critique of Molinism. Molinists contend that there are true counterfactuals of world-actualization (i.e., conditionals of the form, "If God were to do X, world W would be actual") which constitute part of God's middle knowledge. But Zagzebski sees no way in which such a counterfactual could be known by God logically prior to his knowledge that the world mentioned in the consequent is actual, given that such counterfactuals are supposed to be contingent. "If God were to do X, W would be actual" will be true in W, but "If God were to do X, W\* would be actual" will be true in W\*; hence, God cannot know which counterfactual is true until he knows which world is actual, and thus cannot use such counterfactuals (as he must if Molinism is to succeed) to guide his world-actualizing decision. But such a criticism ignores the fact that, according to the Molinist, a counterfactual of world-actualization simply follows from oodles of ordinary counterfactuals of creaturely freedom; if the latter can be known prevolitionally (as Zagzebski agrees they can be), there's no problem with the former being known prevolitionally. Zagzebski might respond that she had argued earlier in this chapter (pp. 134-140) that there simply aren't *enough* true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to warrant counterfactuals of world-actualization, for there are many cases where, no matter how rich we make the antecedent, neither "If I were in situation S, I would do A" nor "If I were in situation S, I would not do A" are contingent truths. But Zagzebski's argument here relies on an uncritical assumption that the standard analysis of might counterfactuals should be used to explicate the assertion that, as a free agent, I might or might not do A were I in situation S. Since philosophers have offered convincing reasons for calling that standard analysis into question, Zagzebski's argument against Molinism seems to me to fall far short of the status of a refutation she accords it (p. 144).

Whatever one's assessment of her critical comments on the Boethian, Ockhamist and Molinist solutions, though, Zagzebski's own solutions to the foreknowledge dilemma are sure to arouse much interest. Zagzebski offers three such solutions. One of these is based on a position she calls Thomistic Ockhamism. If we take seriously Aquinas' claim that the primary object of God's knowledge is his own essence, along with the thesis that God's essence is the same in all possible worlds, we are led to the conclusion that "God's mental state of knowing is the same in all possible worlds" (p. 88); that one state will have "the accidental property of secondarily knowing some contingent truths in one world and another set of contingent truths in another world" (p.

89). Such a position, she then argues, would solve the problem of theological fatalism for two reasons: we could no longer view any particular contingent action on our part as entailed by God's beliefs, and we could no longer plausibly see God's beliefs as accidentally necessary.

While such a solution is surely intriguing, it seems clear to me that it ultimately depends upon the Thomistic conception of divine simplicity. This conception has undergone a bit of a revival of late, but the objections against it are many and powerful. Hence, this first solution of Zagzebski's is likely to be widely viewed as less than promising.

Zagzebski's other two solutions are presented via a discussion of the well-known Frankfurt-Fischer case, where Black installs a mechanism in Jones' brain which would cause Jones to choose to vote for Reagan should he show any signs of voting for Carter, but the mechanism is never activated because Jones chooses on his own to vote for Reagan. In such a case, many philosophers believe, Jones acts freely even though he couldn't have done otherwise. But if ability to do otherwise isn't a necessary condition of freedom, then perhaps actions foreknown by God can be free even though his foreknowing them precludes our doing otherwise.

In developing this suggestion into her second solution, Zagzebski argues that what the Frankfurt-Fischer case shows is that, if a choice is counterfactually dependent on the conditions that make it impossible for the agent to do otherwise, the choice is unfree, but if that choice is counterfactually independent of those conditions, then their presence need not be seen as compromising the choice's freedom. Since, in the Frankfurt-Fischer case, Jones would have voted for Reagan even if Black hadn't installed his nefarious mechanism, the presence of that mechanism doesn't count against Jones' freedom. Suppose, then, that I do S and that God believed long ago that I would do S. If it's true that I would have done S even if God hadn't believed that I would do it, then his foreknowledge needn't count against my freedom.

But how defend the *prima facie* implausible claim that, if God hadn't believed that I would do S, I would have done S anyway? Zagzebski attempts to do so by considering conditionals about what would have been the case had God not been omniscient and not believed that I would do S, and by arguing that not all such conditionals need be seen as vacuously true simply because their antecedents are impossible.

Though much of what Zagzebski says about counterfactuals with impossible antecedents seems on target to me, I must confess that the relevance of her discussion of them escapes me. In defending the claim that Jones would have voted for Reagan if Black's mechanism hadn't been installed, we're assuming that the *other* factors which together with the mechanism necessitate Jones' vote (namely, the relevant conditions about Jones at the time of installation, along with the relevant causal laws) remain constant. That is,

we're saying that, had the mechanism not been installed *and those conditions and laws (still) held*, Jones (still) would have voted for Reagan. We're not, I take it, saying that Jones would have voted for Reagan had the mechanism not been installed and had those conditions and/or laws been different. Had things been *that* different from the way they actually were, who can say with any degree of confidence *what* Jones would have done?

But then, in defending the claim that I would have done S if God hadn't believed that I would do S, we'd similarly have to assume that the *other* factor which together with God's belief necessitates my doing S (namely, the fact that God is omniscient) also remains constant. That is, we'd have to be saying that, had God not believed that I would do S *and God (still) been omniscient*, I would (still) have done S. Since it's hard to see how any theist could affirm such a conditional, Zagzebski's second solution seems to fail.

Zagzebski's third solution hinges on her claim that "an important disanalogy between the foreknowledge case and the Frankfurt-Fischer cases makes it most reasonable to maintain that in the former case I *can* do otherwise" (p. 162). For the Frankfurt-Fischer case depends upon their being worlds in which Jones is prevented from doing what he otherwise would have done by Black's intervention. But it *can't* be the case that my action is at odds with God's foreknowledge. Had I acted otherwise, God would have foreknown otherwise. God's foreknowledge is always in accord with what I choose to do; it "prevents" or logically precludes only my doing what I don't choose to do. Hence, Zagzebski concludes, it ought not be seen as incompatible with my ability to do otherwise.

Zagzebski's discussion of this third solution is much more extended and detailed than this summary suggests. Still, I think enough has been said to point to one central problem with this third solution. Zagzebski's argument is reminiscent of soft determinists' claims that freedom is compatible with determinism because an act which is determined need not be compelled; determinism leaves us (very often, at least) doing what we want to do, and (again, very often) is consistent with the claim that we would have done otherwise had we wanted to do otherwise. Libertarians have traditionally looked unkindly upon these claims, and insisted that more is required for a person to be able to do otherwise. A similar reaction, I suspect, will not be uncommon to those encountering this third solution. *By itself*, the fact that God's foreknowledge can never thwart my will is insufficient to justify the claim that I could have done otherwise.

For all their ingenuity, then, none of Zagzebski's three solutions strikes me as particularly plausible. Some readers will no doubt concur with this negative assessment, but, finding the three more traditional approaches Zagzebski criticizes equally unpalatable, despair of finding a tenable solution. Though such despair seems to me unwarranted, it does point to a truth which most

of us, in rare moments of total honesty, have at least glimpsed. Any solution to this problem comes at a price. Any solution commits one to saying things that, other things being equal, one would rather not say. One may eventually convince oneself that they're worth saying, and perhaps even that they are, on reflection, not as implausible as one initially thought. But few of us ever escape entirely from the penumbra of that initial implausibility. Zagzebski does a fairly good job of pointing to the shadows of doubt which beset her competitors' stances. My fear is that her solutions are accompanied by shadows at least as deep.

*Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism*, by Nelson Pike. (Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion) Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992. Pp. xiv & 224. N.p.

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An apter subtitle of this excellent volume would be "an essay in the phenomenology of *Christian* mysticism." Pike's book is divided into two parts. Its first four chapters gather the data. The last four are "more critical" and "provide a phenomenological account that fits the data assembled in the first half of the book" (xiii). It concludes with three supplementary studies. The first argues that (contrary to the standard interpretation) R.C. Zaehner didn't think that monistic and theistic mystical experiences are phenomenologically distinct. Monistic and theistic mystics interpret their states differently, and react to them differently, but their experiences are the same. The second criticizes Steven Katz's account of Christian mysticism, and the third attacks Stace's contention that theistic mystics are irrational in not accepting the monistic implications of their experiences of undifferentiated unity. I will summarize Pike's argument and conclude with three critical comments.

The first two chapters describe the three principal forms of mystical prayer. The soul is directly aware of God in each but the degree of intimacy and the place of encounter differ. In the Prayer of Quiet, "God and the soul are close to each other" (5). In Full Union and (the culmination of) Rapture, however, they penetrate each other; God and the soul are held in mutual embrace. In the Prayer of Quiet and Full Union, the encounter between self and God takes place *within* the soul of the mystic. In Rapture, it transpires outside the mystic's soul. Quiet and Union thus differ with respect to the nature of the encounter but are alike with respect to its domain. In Full Union and Rapture, the *nature* of the encounter is the same but its *place* differs.

Full Union and Rapture sometimes culminate in Union without Distinction. In this state, the mystic no longer distinguishes between herself and God; God is not experienced as a "not-me." Yet "the awareness of self can emerge