

1-1-2008

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Recommended Citation

Graham, Peter (2008) "Warfield On Divine Foreknowledge And Human Freedom," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol25/iss1/4>

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WARFIELD ON DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

Peter A. Graham

Warfield (1997, 2000) argues that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible. He assumes for conditional proof that there is a necessarily existent omniscient being. He also assumes that it is possible for there to be a person who both does something and could have avoided doing it. As support for this latter premise he points to the fact that nearly every participant to the debate accepts the falsity of logical fatalism. Appealing to this consensus, however, renders the argument question-begging, for that consensus has emerged only against the backdrop of an assumption that there is no necessarily existent omniscient being.

Warfield (1997) argues in the following way for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. (Let P = Jones ϕ s in A.D. 2000 and Jones could have refrained from ϕ -ing in A.D. 2000, Q = It was true at the beginning of time that Jones ϕ s in A.D. 2000, G = God exists, O = God is omniscient, and K = God knows at the beginning of time that Jones ϕ s in A.D. 2000.)

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| (1) $\Box(G \ \& \ O)$ | Premise |
| (2) $\Diamond(P \ \& \ Q)$ | Premise |
| (3) $\Box(Q \supset (G \ \& \ O))$ | 1, classical logic |
| (4) $\Box((\Diamond(P \ \& \ Q) \ \& \ \Box(Q \supset (G \ \& \ O))) \supset \Diamond(P \ \& \ (G \ \& \ O)))$ | Necessary Truth |
| (5) $\Diamond(P \ \& \ (G \ \& \ O))$ | 2,3,4 classical logic |
| (6) $\Box((P \ \& \ (G \ \& \ O)) \supset K)$ | Premise |
| (7) $\Diamond(P \ \& \ (G \ \& \ (O \ \& \ K)))$ | 5,6 classical logic |

The conclusion, (7), is the claim that it is possible for Jones to ϕ in A.D. 2000 freely (i.e., Jones does ϕ then while he could, at the same time, have refrained from doing so) even though God knew at the beginning of time that he would ϕ in A.D. 2000.

Warfield's argument is flawed. (6) seems wholly uncontroversial. It says that necessarily if P is true and God exists and is omniscient, then God knew at the beginning of time that P . (1), on the other hand, is quite controversial. But suppose we accept (1). What grounds do we have for accepting (2)? Warfield says:



The problem of logical fatalism has been solved. That is, almost everyone will agree that, for example, the following two propositions are consistent:

- (a) Plantinga will freely climb Mount Rushmore in A.D. 2000
 - (b) It was true in A.D. 50 that Plantinga will climb Mount Rushmore in A.D. 2000
- (b), of course, implies that
- (c) Plantinga will climb Mount Rushmore in A.D. 2000

but casts no doubt on Plantinga's power to refrain from so doing. If Plantinga were to refrain from climbing, (b) would not have been true, but this does not, the refutations of fatalism assure us, require Plantinga to have objectionable "power over the past." (Warfield 1997, p. 80)

Warfield's support for premise (2) then seems to be the fact that "the problem of logical fatalism has been solved." That is, he claims to support premise (2) by pointing to the philosophical community and saying, "Look, see, the philosophical community agrees that (a) and (b) are compossible, therefore it is legitimate for me to appeal to it in an argument for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom." In his reply to Anthony Brueckner's critique of his argument in "On Freedom and Foreknowledge: A Reply to Two Critics" Warfield says:

I did not in any way endorse the "strategy" that Brueckner attributes to me. What I did say in presenting my argument is this: "I assume that fatalism is false and not merely that the arguments for it are unpersuasive" (p.84, note 3). I take logical fatalism to be the doctrine that true future tensed propositions about human action are incompatible with free performance of these actions. The falsity of this position, then, implies that free action is compatible with true future tensed propositions describing the actions (and does not merely imply that certain arguments for the fatalist position are unpersuasive).

Is it in any way dialectically inappropriate to assume the falsity of logical fatalism in providing my argument for theological compatibilism? I don't think it is. After all, as noted both in my earlier article and again in reply to Professor Hasker, I know of no participant in the foreknowledge debate (compatibilist or incompatibilist) who does not accept the falsity of logical fatalism. Relevant interlocutors therefore have no room to disagree with this assumption. (Warfield 2000, pp. 257–58)

Pace Warfield, it is dialectically inappropriate to assume the falsity of logical fatalism in providing his argument for theological compatibilism. If one accepts (1), i.e., if one accepts that it is a necessary truth that God exists and is omniscient, then there is no separate question of the truth of logical fatalism independent of the question of whether human freedom is compatible with God's omniscience. That is, if (1) is true, then the question of whether logical fatalism is false *just is* the question of whether human

freedom is compatible with God’s omniscience. Discussions of logical fatalism in the philosophical literature bracket the question of the truth of (1). In other words, discussions of logical fatalism proceed on the assumption that (1) is false. Thus, if (1) is true, employing (2) in an argument for (7) is all so much begging the question. If (1) is false, then Warfield’s argument is unsound.

To make more vivid how Warfield’s argument is flawed consider a structurally analogous argument offered as a response to the traditional problem of evil. (Let P = there is some unnecessary and undeserved suffering in the world, G = God exists, and O = God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.)

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| (1*) $\Box(G \ \& \ O)$ | Premise |
| (2*) $\Diamond P$ | Premise |
| (3*) $\Box(P \supset (G \ \& \ O))$ | 1, classical logic |
| (4*) $\Box((\Diamond P \ \& \ \Box(P \supset (G \ \& \ O))) \supset \Diamond(P \ \& \ (G \ \& \ O)))$ | Necessary Truth |
| (5*) $\Diamond(P \ \& \ (G \ \& \ O))$ | 2,3 classical logic |

Suppose someone—let’s call him Smith—gave this argument for the compatibility of the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God and the existence of unnecessary and undeserved suffering and offered as his support for (2*) the fact that in his philosophical community everyone accepts that it is possible for there to be unnecessary and undeserved suffering. Suppose that within that community some philosophers had argued that on the basis of non-theological considerations it was impossible that there be any unnecessary and undeserved suffering. Though the consensus of that philosophical community is that those arguments are bad and that it is possible for there to be unnecessary and undeserved suffering, it would be dialectically out of place for Smith to appeal to that consensus as his support for (2*) given that he is assuming (1*) in his argument. The consensus of the philosophical community that it is possible that there be unnecessary and undeserved suffering is a consensus that brackets the question of the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God. If those in the philosophical community who accept that it is possible for there to be unnecessary and undeserved suffering don’t even consider the possibility of the necessary existence of an omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent God, then appealing to their acceptance of this possibility in an attempt to resolve the problem of evil surely is not kosher. Either (1*) is true, in which case, their case for the possibility of unnecessary and undeserved suffering is incomplete without an answer to the traditional problem of evil and, thus, (2*) of Smith’s argument is wholly unsupported, or (1*) is false, in which case, Smith’s argument is unsound.

Warfield’s argument for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom is in just as bad shape as is Smith’s resolution of the problem of evil. Both should be rejected.

REFERENCES

- Warfield, Ted A. 1997. "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom Are Compatible," *Nous* 31: 80–86.
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