

GOD'S DIVINELY JUSTIFIED KNOWLEDGE IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH HUMAN FREE WILL

JOHN SHOOK

University at Buffalo

Abstract. A new version of the incompatibilist argument is developed. Knowledge is (at least) justified true belief. If God's divine knowledge must be justified knowledge, then humans cannot have the "alternative possibilities" type of free will. This incompatibilist argument is immunized against the application of the hard-soft fact distinction. If divine knowledge is justified, then the only kind of facts that God can know are hard facts, permitting this incompatibilist argument to succeed.

God's omniscience may be incompatible with human free will, depending on the definitions of both omniscience and freedom. This essay argues for an incompatibility between one conception of God's omniscience and one conception of human free will. In the multitude of recent arguments, pro and con, concerning their compatibility, a typical way to begin to elucidate the nature of God's omniscience is to attribute to God the possession of all and only true beliefs. Interestingly, one factor in God's all-knowing nature has been largely passed over in silence so far: the justification for God's divine knowledge (divine in the sense that such perfect knowledge is not the sort of fallible or imprecise knowledge gained by science). If knowledge requires justification (of some sort) then God's omniscience includes the possession of justification. The principle that divine knowledge of truths must be justified has a major (if yet unnoticed) impact on the compatibilism issue. A new version of the standard argument for incompatibilism is developed here, proceeding from the premise that God's divine knowledge must be justified knowledge, to the conclusion that God's divine knowledge is incompatible with the "alternative possibilities" type of free will.

This conception of free will is based on the (often criticized) principle of alternative possibilities: roughly, for any free action performed by an agent, it must have been possible for her to instead do something else. Only this notion of “alternative possibilities” is meant when the term “free will” and “freedom” is hereafter used, and the question of whether this sense of free will is itself philosophically coherent and defensible is not this essay’s burden. Nor will the premise that God possesses justification for knowledge be defended. The number of theists who would embrace the alternative that God has no justification is likely at least as small as the number of theists who have embraced determinism or have surrendered free will. Furthermore, the incompatibilist argument offered here does not rely on any specific conception or understanding about the nature of God’s justification for knowledge. Perhaps the way in which God possesses justification is a religious mystery, like so many other things about God’s nature, and a relatively comfortable mystery at that. Be that as it may, the inscrutability of divine justification has no bearing on the logic of this “justification incompatibility” argument. In fact, this incompatibilism argument does not include any premise that requires an omniscient God to exist in our actual world.

After the incompatibilist argument is explained, the crucial role for God’s justified knowledge is revealed: any appeal to the hard-soft fact distinction will fail to obstruct the incompatibilist argument. This essay defends the view that if knowledge is justified, then the hard fact/soft fact distinction collapses into a hard fact/no fact distinction. The only kind of facts that God can know are hard facts, permitting the incompatibilist argument to succeed.

I. WHY SHOULD PREDICTION BE INCOMPATIBLE WITH FREEDOM?

Having confessed that the nature of divine knowledge in general and justification in particular may remain a mystery, where can we begin to expose any conflict between God’s justified knowledge and human freedom? We may first ask how it is possible that people can make (humanly) justified predictions, and hence how we can sometimes possess (humanly fallible) knowledge of future events. We would have no suspicion that God’s knowledge could prevent free will unless we already had some notion of why our own knowledge might do the same. We need not thereby presume that God’s knowledge is similar in nature to ours; yet, the problem of om-

niscience and freedom is both historically and logically consequent upon the dawning notion that our knowledge of the future might be incompatible with freedom.

As a minimum condition, we do have some measure of success at predicting certain kinds of future events, because relatively constant or periodic regularities are displayed by things in our environment. Without going into unnecessary details, the kind of universe that we inhabit is the beginning of an explanation for our (limited) capacity to make more or less accurate predictions. It is irrelevant whether we now possess or ever will possess a fully satisfactory explanation for this capacity; it suffices here only to point out that in a very different universe, creatures may have great difficulty in making any successful predictions. Fortunately for us, our universe permits many kinds of precise and imprecise predictions that turn out (more or less) correct, by sustaining both predictable things and predictors like us.

What is the relationship between predictability and the free will of alternative possibilities? Let us further explore the connection between justification and human knowledge. What justification is available for our common-sense claim that a wind-up toy, for example, my "Thomas the Train" toy, does not freely choose its behavior? Of course, we have an immediate intuition that this toy cannot make any free choices, since it lacks all consciousness or cognitive capacity, necessary for freedom. But what grounds this easy intuition, that a mere mechanical automaton lacks such capacities? If we explore our intuition further, we will untangle a deep connection between predictability and free will. Those who still rebel at bothering to ask about the free will of a wind-up toy are invited to substitute an intricate object of unknown origin, discovered on an alien planet. Is it alive? Is it just a machine? All we have for clues is its behavior.

It can easily be seen that after a good winding-up and being placed upright on a smooth floor, Thomas will move about 8 feet before slowing to a halt somewhere (let that location be called L). After we have carefully observed Thomas's behavior in that type of situation for a few trial runs, when Thomas is again wound-up and released on the floor we can roughly predict where he will go if unimpeded. In other senses of "freedom" beside the freedom of alternative possibilities, perhaps Thomas's behavior on the floor is free. Regardless, we can all at least agree that Thomas lacks "alternative possibility" freedom. But why?

What is it about Thomas that makes us sure that after being placed in that type of situation he did not freely choose to arrive at that particular destination L? To reply that Thomas is just a machine is but a half-way

step. The full reply must explain why a machine's properties deny it free choice. The relevant properties of a machine are (1) the process by which Thomas converts potential energy in its wound-up spring, into the kinetic energy transferred through the gears and axle to the motion of his rear wheels; (2) the natural laws of energy conversion and transference that completely describe this process and the natural laws of friction, collision, etc; and (3) the permanence and fixity of these natural laws. These three properties give us the basis for answering the following question: Could Thomas, given the initial conditions of a situation (the amount of energy in his spring, the surface upon which he is set, his initial direction, obstacles before him, etc.), have arrived by his own powers at any other position beside L? Of course, his travel could be interrupted by some outside force. The vital question is rather, whether Thomas not merely controls his travel, but freely chooses his travel, in the sense of freedom as alternative possibilities. We can agree that Thomas (or a person) supplies causal powers in situations that result in behavior. Thomas himself does supply many causal factors necessary to a full explanation of why he ended up at L. The real question is instead whether Thomas (or a person) is capable of using his causal powers to both possibly arrive at L or possibly arrive at not-L after being released to take a run. Given the three relevant properties of a machine sketched above, it is not the case that Thomas, in a particular situation and given its initial conditions, could possibly arrive at not-L. Put another way, we seem to be justified in believing that if all the initial conditions were exactly re-set, and no outside force interfered, Thomas would arrive at precisely L again. This then, gives us the confidence to say that it was not possible for Thomas to arrive at any place other than L during that run, and hence that Thomas could never freely choose.

II. THE ARGUMENT FOR INCOMPATIBILISM

However sound this mechanistic explanation for Thomas's lack of free will may be, its relevance to the ultimate issue of God's omniscience may not be apparent. I am indeed not arguing that God's omniscience somehow guarantees that natural laws completely dictate all events. Rather, the mechanistic explanation for our confidence that Thomas lacks freedom of choice can be generalized to a more abstract level. The abstraction proceeds by focusing on one consequence of the explanation. Remembering that the initial conditions and the natural laws together doom Thomas, how should we respond to that inevitable freshman rejoinder, "Well, no one

could actually predict where Thomas would exactly go, so maybe he does freely choose!” Such a rejoinder comes easily to the lips, since the fact that we ourselves can be quite unpredictable can help to reassure us (perhaps unjustifiably) that we really do possess free will. The only adequate response must build upon the mechanistic explanation in order to handle the admitted fact that no human being could actually determine where *exactly* Thomas would go. The first step of such a response is to point out that if someone (perhaps the mechanical engineer who designs toys like Thomas) did have a good understanding of Thomas’s mechanical processes and the natural laws pertaining to them, plus some fairly precise data on the initial conditions of the situation, and also a powerful computer, this person could make a much better prediction of Thomas’s behavior than any of the rest of us. That point having been accepted, then the second step is to imagine an intelligence with perfect knowledge and calculating ability. If such a being were to exist, and to possess that degree of knowledge and calculating ability, then that being could perfectly, infallibly, and justifiably predict Thomas’s behavior in such situations. From that being’s perspective on Thomas and his situation, Thomas lacks free will.

It is absolutely essential to notice that it is not necessary for this super-intelligent being to actually exist. The argument is really about the way the universe is, not about the way God is or not. Let the possible existence of such a super-intelligent being be only a *theoretical* possibility. Then Thomas’s behavior is theoretically perfectly predictable, and we human beings cannot predict Thomas’s behavior only because of our ignorance. Since it is quite unreasonable to think that whether or not Thomas really freely chooses his travel path is dependent on whether anyone actually takes the time and trouble to offer a prediction of his destination, then so too is it quite unreasonable to require the actual existence of a supremely intelligent being who actually does make a perfect prediction in order for Thomas (or ourselves) to lose his ability to freely choose. Either Thomas really is freely choosing, or he really is not; the only important factor involved is whether he is theoretically perfectly predictable, and not whether any intelligent being actually makes a perfect prediction.

Of course, the same point must be applied to us. If people are, like Thomas, theoretically perfectly predictable because of the way that our universe is like, then people never really make free choices in the sense of choosing between alternative possibilities. The undoubted fact that people can be unpredictable (to each other and to themselves) is irrelevant, just as Thomas’s unpredictability is irrelevant to whether he is really a free chooser.

These suggestive moves must be more carefully formulated before a strong incompatibilist argument can be elaborated. For one thing, a theist might take the position that machines like Thomas, or perhaps much more complicated machines like Thomas, actually do possess the free will of alternative possibilities. To that position, we can make the following reply. If Thomas indeed has free will, we should then believe that he is not perfectly predictable, and we should probably also suppose that we aren't either. If the objecting theist wants to grant Thomas and us the free will of alternative possibilities, then she should properly conclude that God cannot make perfect and infallible predictions about some of our actions.

Furthermore, the notion of an intelligent being that could perfectly predict future events must be very carefully formulated. Consider the premise, "If an intelligent being G could know prior to T that event E will take place at time T, then it is not possible that event E does not take place at time T." This premise had better not be taken to mean, "If there is some possible world in which G knows prior to T that E will occur at T, then there is no possible world in which E does not occur at T," because this premise would be manifestly false. Instead, the notion of a theoretically perfect predictor will be explicated in the argument below as follows: "If there exists some possible world, that is relevantly similar to the actual world, in which an intelligent being justifiably knows prior to T that E will occur at T, then in all possible worlds relevantly similar to the actual world, E takes place at T." What counts as "relevantly similar" to the actual world? Recall that we are interested in the sort of world in which a thing like Thomas or a human being is theoretically perfectly predictable. Therefore, the actual world conditions, whatever they may be, that permit such predictability are those conditions sustained in any relevantly similar possible world.

Let us proceed then to the full argument. In what follows, the term "freely chooses" appears: for the purposes of this argument, a "free choice" is a choice made by someone who has the free will to make that choice. Also, when a contrast is drawn between doing A and doing not-A, not-A is understood as anything other than doing A, including doing nothing at all. Furthermore, "know" is understood here to refer to the sort of infallible knowledge possessed by a theoretically perfect predictor, or by God, and does not refer to the sort of humanly fallible knowing achieved by human beings in the course of ordinary life or scientific inquiry.

1. If person P freely chooses action A at time T in situation S, then for all relevantly similar worlds and at all times in those worlds prior to T, it is possible that P instead does not-A at T in S. This premise has the

form, If PF then PNA, where

PF = person P freely chooses action A at time T in situation S

PNA = for all relevantly similar worlds and at all times in those worlds prior to T, it is possible that P instead does not-A at T in S.

2. If not-PNA then not-PF. (from 1)

3. If there exists some possible world, that is relevantly similar to the actual world, in which an intelligent being justifiably knows prior to T that P does A at T in S, then in all possible worlds relevantly similar to the actual world, P does A at T in S. This premise has the form, If IJK then PWPA, where

IJK = there exists some possible world, that is relevantly similar to the actual world, in which an intelligent being justifiably knows prior to T that P does A at T in S

PWPA = in all possible worlds relevantly similar to the actual world, P does A at T in S.

4. If in all possible worlds relevantly similar to the actual world, P does A at T in S, then it is not the case that for all relevantly similar worlds and at all times in those worlds prior to T, it is possible that P instead does not-A at T in S. This premise has the form, If PWPA then not-PNA.

5. If IJK then not-PNA. (from 3 and 4)

6. If IJK then not-PF (from 2 and 5)—If there exists some possible world, that is relevantly similar to the actual world, in which an intelligent being justifiably knows prior to T that P does A at T in S, then P does not freely choose A at T in S.

Premise 6 yields the anticipated conclusion, which effectively states that if God is an existing omnisciently intelligent being, then it is not the case that person P freely chooses action A at time T in situation S. Because this conclusion is generalizable over any person, any situation, and any action, it effectively states that no person has ever, or could ever, make a free choice if an omnisciently intelligent being exists.

III. CAN THE HARD–SOFT FACT DISTINCTION DEFUSE INCOMPATIBILISM?

The distinction between hard and soft facts has been used by compatibilists to argue that God's divine foreknowledge is not incompatible with human free will. The debate over this distinction has so far ignored the status of God's justification for divine knowledge. In order for my incompatibilist argument to succeed, if God's foreknowledge is justified, then the propositions about future events known by God must be hard facts. This section argues that the very distinction between hard and soft facts is illusory because alleged soft facts are judged to be facts due to a tacit presumption that justification exists.¹ If knowledge is justified, then the hard fact/soft fact distinction collapses into a hard fact/no fact distinction. Therefore, if God justifiably knows all facts, human beings cannot possess free will.

Briefly and crudely stated, a "hard" fact is not dependent on the truth of another future fact, while a "soft" fact is true only in virtue of the truth of some future fact. For example, "person P does action A in 2000" is a hard fact, while "in 1996 it is true that person P does action A in 2000" is a soft fact. Hard facts are supposed to be really about the event at the time it occurs, while soft facts only superficially appear to be really about the event at the time it occurs. On this interpretation of such allegedly soft facts, the proposition "P does A in 2000" is really about an event occurring in 2000, *and* so is "In 1996 it is true that P does A in 2000," *and* so is "In 1996 person G knows that it is true that P does A in 2000." The value of this distinction primarily lies in its ability to dissolve the so-called "logical determinism" argument² but many philosophers have also employed it against certain types of incompatibilist arguments. Because Ockham's attempted refutation of incompatibilism can be interpreted as relying on the hard/soft fact distinction³, let us call such employments "Ockhamist" counter-arguments. The effectiveness of any Ockhamist counter-argument

¹ An earlier and abbreviated version of this section appeared in "God's Justified Knowledge and the Hard-Soft Fact Distinction," in *The Proceedings of the XXI World Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 8: *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William Sweet (Ankara: Philosophical Society of Turkey, 2006), pp. 69-73.

² William Hasker, "Hard Facts and Theological Determinism" (1988), reprinted in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, ed. John M. Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 159-161.

³ See Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out" (1986), reprinted in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, ed. John M. Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 178-215.

of course demands that the incompatibilist argument include as a premise something like the following:

N. God knows, at some time prior to T, "P does A at T."

Many incompatibilist arguments, especially those inspired by the scheme laid down in Nelson Pike's seminal essay⁴, contain a premise having N's form. Compatibilists employing the "hard/soft" fact distinction claim that a premise of N's form should be understood as a soft fact. As a soft fact, N only appears to be about an event occurring prior to time T, but N is really about an event occurring at T. These compatibilists then conclude that the truth of N cannot be used in conjunction with a premise like N+1 to infer a statement having the form of N+2.

N+1. If God knows, prior to T, "P does A at T," then it is not possible that it is not the case that P does A at T.

N+2. It is not possible that it is not the case that P does A at T.

The inspiration for denying that N and N+1 can together justify N+2 lies in the "soft" nature of N. If N is really only about the event of P doing A at T, the truth of N cannot prevent the possibility of P doing not-A at T, since if P does not-A, then it would have been the case that God knows, prior to T, the truth of "P does not-A at T." Only if N were a hard fact about an event prior to T could the inference from N and N+1 to N+2 succeed.

Major difficulties have been raised with both the very distinction between hard and soft facts (for example see John Martin Fischer's "Freedom and Foreknowledge"⁵) and the applicability of this distinction to divine omniscience (for example, William Hasker's "Foreknowledge and Necessity"⁶). I am not at all confident that the discussion to date about this distinction has been very fruitful, and perhaps some participants would agree. For the

⁴ Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action" (1965), reprinted in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, ed. John M. Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 57-73.

⁵ John Martin Fischer, "Freedom and Foreknowledge" (1983), reprinted in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, ed. John M. Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 86-96.

⁶ William Hasker, "Foreknowledge and Necessity" (1985), reprinted in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, ed. John M. Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 227-236.

most part, positions that have been taken, pro and con, somehow involve the nature of divine beliefs (or similar things like divine predictions). This might be a consequence of the fact that several influential incompatibilist arguments have used premises that describe God's knowledge as true belief. In any case, emphasis has more often than not been placed on belief as a component of divine knowledge than on justification. However, I would like to suggest that the apparent difference between a hard fact and a soft fact is actually a manifestation of justification. If this suggestion is plausible, then divine justification is relevant to incompatibilist arguments.

How is justification relevant to the hard/soft fact distinction? A soft fact is a proposition that mentions two times, an earlier and a later time, and its truth is dependent on what happens at the later time. For example, if I drink tea tomorrow, "On Monday Peter has the true belief that John drinks tea on the next day (Tuesday) at 5pm" appears to be soft fact because its truth on Monday seems to be grounded in something that happens on Tuesday. The precise wording of a soft fact is all-important. Compare these propositions:

- A. Peter believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday.
- B. On Monday Peter believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday.
- C. On Monday Peter believed that John drinks tea on Monday.

Proposition A has lost all or nearly all of the softness because whether Peter believes what he believes does not depend on what John does on Tuesday. Of course, a good explanation for Peter's belief will likely involve what John does on Tuesday, anticipating my point that justification or something like justification is involved in our judgment of softness or hardness. Does proposition B or C share in A's hardness? It would seem so, although the use of the past tense in "believed" disrupts our judgment somewhat. The insertion of "On Monday" should not cause us to attribute some degree of softness to B, and C's past tense variation upon B should likewise not signal softness. A, B, and C are all hard facts, since C can be true regardless of what happens on Tuesday.

But now consider these further variants:

- D. Peter correctly believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday.
- E. On Monday Peter correctly believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday.

- F. On Monday Peter correctly believed that John drinks tea on Tuesday.

To prevent confusion, these variants use “correctly believes,” etc., because “truly believes” has a distracting connotation. These three propositions are now soft facts—what actually happens on Tuesday determines whether Peter is correct on Monday. Put another way, if John does not drink tea on Tuesday, Peter cannot have a correct belief on Monday that John drinks tea on Tuesday. Why is this so? Those who would find hardness in D, E, or F might point out that it must be the case that if Peter has a correct belief B, then B *must* be true. This is acceptable, but it avoids the real question of dependency: when is B true? Those who find softness in D, E, and F will point out that it is also the case that if B is not true, then Peter does not have a *correct* belief, and therefore the correctness depends on whether B actually turns out to be correct. From the perspective of those defending hardness here, the issue of when a belief is true sounds quite odd: propositions like “John drinks tea on Tuesday” are timelessly true if true at all. However, (1) whether such a proposition is true must at least depend on what happens on Tuesday, and (2) beliefs are not equivalent to propositions.

The attribution of “correctness” or “truth” to a belief is accomplished by human beings, not by abstract propositions. When we are asked to consider a proposition that attributes truth to someone’s belief, our acceptance of that proposition as a fact (regardless of whether we then judge that it is a hard or soft fact) is deeply linked with our practices of judging truth. Passing judgment on whether it is a fact that a belief is correct always involves, openly or implicitly, our estimate of the justification for that belief. That is why the debate over the hardness and softness of facts has been interminable: the context of estimating whether such alleged facts really are facts is usually ignored. When we are asked to accept E, for example, as a fact, we automatically suppose that sufficient justification exists. To reveal our dependency on justification, consider these additional variants to determine whether they are hard or soft facts:

- G. On Monday Peter believes without any justification that John drinks tea on Tuesday.
- H. On Monday Peter believes with some justification that John drinks tea on Tuesday.

- J. On Monday Peter believes with sufficient justification that John drinks tea on Tuesday.

Propositions G and H are hard facts, but what about J? The hardness or softness of J depends on how it is read. If the justification possessed by Peter's belief exists on Monday, then J is a hard fact. After all, Peter can have a fully justified belief that turns out to be false. However, J can also be read as an attribution of justification to Peter's belief by the reader—if so, then whether Peter's belief is justified depends on whether John drinks tea on Tuesday, and so J is a soft fact in that context. These two possible readings of J are also at work when we consider a proposition like E: "On Monday Peter correctly believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday." We are supposed to consider E as a fact—"Peter correctly believes"—and we have an option whether to (a) account for the correctness by attributing to Peter's belief enough justification on Monday to explain why the belief is correct, or (b) to account for the correctness by attributing to Peter's belief enough justification on Tuesday to explain why the belief is correct. On the first reading, E is a hard fact, while on the second reading, E is a soft fact.

Another way to make this point, that judgments of the softness or hardness of facts depend on the reader's attitude towards the justification available, is to ask the reader of such a fact to insert themselves into the timeline of events. Consider these two options.

You, the reader, are considering this fact on Monday, and you say:

- K. "Today Peter correctly believes that John drinks tea tomorrow."

You, the reader, are considering this fact on Wednesday, and you say:

- L. "Peter correctly believed on Monday that John drank tea yesterday."

Are these facts, K and L, hard or soft? L appears to be a classic example of a soft fact: there is no trouble with accepting it as a fact, and the correctness of Peter's belief is dependent on Tuesday's events.

K is not so simple. You may be tempted to classify K as a hard fact, since K is a fact, and because it is a fact, the correctness of Peter's belief is already a permanent property of Peter's belief and cannot be changed by Tuesday's events. On this line of thought, K's status as a fact *on Monday* entails that John drinks tea tomorrow. The counter-claim that if John does not drink tea tomorrow, then K would not be fact, is quite irrelevant. K is already a fact on Monday, and whatever happens on Tuesday cannot pre-

vent it (perhaps the principle of the fixity of the past is at work here). That means that on Monday, it is not the case that John drinks tea tomorrow, and so K's status as a fact (and hence the correctness of Peter's belief) is not dependent on Tuesday's events.

There is another possible reading of K: to read it as a soft fact by pointing out that the more natural reading of K is to account for the correctness of Peter's belief by events on Tuesday. You might say, "Peter correctly believes, only if John does drink tea tomorrow." And to further defend K's softness, you should say, "The correctness of Peter's belief depends on whether John does drink tea tomorrow." But why do you also say that "Today Peter correctly believes that John drinks tea tomorrow"? There is a pragmatic inconsistency involved in claiming that

- M. "It is a fact that Peter correctly believes today that John drinks tea tomorrow, and only if John does drink tea tomorrow can Peter's belief be correct."

The pragmatic inconsistency of M is better exposed by starting with the oddity of an analogous claim M*, that "Peter knows now that John dies tomorrow, but only if John does die tomorrow can Peter know that." Putting this phrase in the mouth of a sincere speaker exposes its strangeness, because when a person says "only if John does die tomorrow" they are understood as being less than certain that John dies tomorrow. This lack of uncertainty expressed in the latter part of M* pragmatically clashes with the knowledge claim expressed by the first part. Compare against this sentence M** which lacks this pragmatic inconsistency: "Peter knows now that John dies tomorrow, and since John does die tomorrow Peter can know that."

Therefore, we must reject the second possible reading of K as a soft fact, because it requires also claiming M. However, this is hardly a victory for those preferring K's hardness. Those who try to defend K's softness have another strategy available: in light of M's strangeness, it might be better to reject K's status as a fact. In other words, whenever a proposition like "Today Peter correctly believes that John drinks tea tomorrow" is offered up as a fact, the reader may politely decline to accept it as a fact at all, since whether it is a fact today simply depends on whether Peter's belief will be justified by tomorrow's events.

Of course, participants defending hard facts in the incompatibility debates have never used claims like K, couched in a particular temporal moment, for the reader's consideration. Instead of K, we read atemporal claims like "God correctly believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday" and

we are supposed to locate God's correct belief in the past while we, the readers, either remain in the present or float above temporal events with the claim. But consider this situation:

You, the reader, are with God at some time prior to the creation of the universe, and you say: "It is a fact that now God correctly believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday, June 16, 2015, at 5pm."

The best strategy for the defender of soft facts, I have been arguing, is to then say, "Well, no, it is not a fact that I can claim, since I have virtually no justification whatsoever." The hard fact/soft fact distinction should here dissolve into the hard fact/no fact distinction: if a proposition is a fact, then it can only be a hard fact. Soft facts are illusions created by our habitual practice of importing the question of justification into our acceptance of a fact. Defenders of soft facts are right to claim that empirical matters of fact like John drinking tea are responsible for the correctness of prior beliefs. The best way to make this point, I have been arguing, is to drive home this dependency by refusing to attribute factual status at a prior time to claims of future empirical events. Facts are not simply facts. This point has sometimes been elaborated by arguing that a belief or claim about a future empirical event or state of affairs is, strictly speaking, neither true nor false at the time the belief or claim is made. What about a proposition, which is supposedly a timeless entity tied to no particular moment? Are propositions about future contingent events necessarily true or false, or is some third indeterminate status available? If my line of argument is plausible, this last question about propositions is ill-formed and should not be asked. Our only method of evaluating the factuality of propositions is to reflectively or habitually consider them in some particular context and thus to tacitly treat them as temporally situated, as beliefs or claims or predictions, etc.

How does this dissolution of the hard fact/soft fact distinction bear on the question of God's justification for divine knowledge? Consider this proposition: "God knows that John drinks tea on Tuesday." If it is a fact, this fact could be accounted for in many ways—God found out later on Wednesday, or Thursday, etc. But the incompatibilism debate instead uses more carefully phrased propositions like: "God knew before Tuesday that John drinks tea on Tuesday." But perhaps God knew because he jumped ahead to Wednesday, discovered what John did on Tuesday, and then went back in time so that he could know prior to Tuesday what John does on Tuesday. That would account for God's knowledge, but theists probably don't have this kind of method of justification in mind when they talk of

God's omniscience. Instead, we are supposed to read such a proposition so as to attribute to God the possession of this knowledge in a way that does not depend on God's knowledge in the future. If we accept this invitation, we are in effect accepting what the theist intends, that such knowledge is actually in God's possession (so to speak) in the past and hence that knowledge exists *as such* in the past. With this acceptance, we would seemingly be forced into the dilemma of interpreting "God knew before Tuesday that John drinks tea on Tuesday" as a hard fact or as a soft fact. After having dissolved this distinction, we are left with two alternatives: either accept this fact as a hard fact, or refuse to acknowledge it as a fact at all.

Either way, theists are left with a potentially uncomfortable choice, impacting the question of whether the free will of alternative possibilities can be protected from God's omniscience. If such propositions are accepted as hard facts, then the fact that God has (in the past) divine knowledge of future events entails that an envisioned future event happens as God knows. Such propositions, as we have seen, cannot be understood properly as soft facts, and so this way of conceiving God's omniscience is proven to be incompatible with the free will of alternative possibilities.

Is the only other alternative to reject such propositions as "God knew before Tuesday that John drinks tea on Tuesday" as simply non-factual? That alternative raises deep metaphysical and theological issues, arousing problems such as whether God's knowledge is limited and cannot penetrate contingent future events. Perhaps this option is the best way to protect the free will of alternative possibilities from God's omniscience. Advocates of this option describe an "open universe" and an "open theism" that contains many kinds of genuine alternative possibilities (among them human free choices) that cannot be perfectly known beforehand.

On my analysis, there is a third option that must be considered before choosing one of the two horns of this dilemma. When one considers the claim "It is a fact that now God correctly believes that John drinks tea on Tuesday, June 16, 2015, at 5pm," and puts oneself back in the past with the occasion of God's (alleged) knowledge, one must feel quite unjustified in making such a claim. However, matters might be very different from God's perspective. Consider this proposition:

- O. "I, God, now know, before the year 2015, that John drinks tea on Tuesday, June 16, 2015, at 5pm."

Unlike any of us, perhaps God possesses justification for his knowledge. Let us set aside remarks like "well, of course God is justified—he is

God, after all”—as non-informative. If God can justifiably know, unlike us, about events in the far future, then could we construct a third alternative to the hard fact/no fact distinction that has not yet been considered? However, it still remains the case that we need to involve justification—few theists should be comfortable with claiming that “It is a fact that God knows, in the absence of any justification, what happens in the future.” This third option would attempt to reconcile a conception of God’s justified divine knowledge with the free will of alternative possibilities. As tempting as this third option sounds, I have already argued that no such reconciliation is possible: If God possesses justified divine knowledge, his capacity for predicting future human actions is incompatible with the free will of alternative possibilities.

IV. INCOMPATIBILISM STRENGTHENED

I promised that the formulation of the incompatibilist argument would allow my argument to handle objections raised through the use of the “hard fact/soft fact” distinction. The middle portion of this paper attempted to dissolve the hard/soft fact distinction by arguing that the category of “soft fact” with regard to divinely justified knowledge is actually empty. My incompatibilist argument should be able to remain immune to objections raised using the notion of soft facts. Recall that the hard/soft fact distinction can be used to dispute incompatibilist arguments that have a premise of type N, as follows:

- N. It is the case that God knows, at some time prior to T, the truth of “P does A at T”

However, my incompatibilist argument is immune from the Ockhamist counter-argument. This is so, simply because my argument does not contain any premise like N. It does contain premise 3, which is instead more similar to N+1.

- N+1. If God knows, prior to T, “P does A at T in S,” then it is not possible that it is not the case that P does A at T in S.

3. If there exists some possible world, that is relevantly similar to the actual world, in which anintelligent being justifiably knows prior to T

that P does A at T in S, then in all possible worlds relevantly similar to the actual world, P does A at T in S.

The Ockhamist need not reject premise 3, so long as its antecedent clause is properly classified as a soft fact. Is "If there exists some possible world, that is relevantly similar to the actual world, in which an intelligent being justifiably knows prior to T that P does A at T in S" a soft fact? Despite the temptation to reply that this antecedent clause is instead a hard fact, honesty demands that this clause is best understood as neither a hard fact nor a soft fact (since it is not a fact at all), but as a mere hypothetical. Please recall that the spirit behind premise two's formulation does not demand that some intelligent being really exists and really could know prior to T that P will do A at T in S. If premise 3 were understood as making a claim about some actually existing intelligent being's ability to know, then the Ockhamist could rightly claim that my incompatibilist argument was tacitly relying on an additional premise, to the effect that there really exists some intelligent being who antecedently knows propositions like "P does A at T in S." This tacit premise would have to be formulated like N, and hence the Ockhamist could try to show how the tacit premise is really a soft fact. However, the real spirit behind premise 3 is to only say that "If any hypothetically existing intelligent being . . ." and not "If an actually existing intelligent being . . ." To conclude, the Ockhamist's counterargument to incompatibilism is doubly irrelevant to the argument offered here. Not only is it the case that premise 3 does not rely on the presumption of any soft facts, neither does it rely on any facts whatsoever.

If an omnisciently intelligent being exists, no one has the free will of alternative possibilities. This conclusion, it must be remembered, was pursued in order to discover whether it is possible to reconcile a conception of God's justified divine knowledge with the free will of alternative possibilities. No such reconciliation is possible: If God possesses justified divine knowledge, his capacity for perfectly predicting future human actions is incompatible with the free will of alternative possibilities. This incompatibilist argument by itself is not completely conclusive on the incompatibilist question, since there are three other options available: (1) to accept God's divine foreknowledge as consisting of hard facts which are also incompatible with the free will of alternative possibilities; (2) to accept the view that God's divine foreknowledge does not encompass free human decisions because those decisions are expressible only in propositions having no determinate truth value; or (3) to reject the characterization of prediction justification elaborated above while at the same time refusing

to provide any alternative positive conception of how God's divine foreknowledge could be justified.

There are also theological strategies which effectively accept the incompatibilist argument and modify our conception of God's capacity for knowledge. One strategy is to deny that anything in God's nature entails the performance of logically impossible tasks. For example, if "creating a stone too heavy to lift" is a logically contradictory task for an omnipotent being, then the ability to perform this task cannot be reasonably expected of any being, including an omnipotent one. Therefore, "omnipotence" must be understood so as to exclude logically impossible tasks. Call this strategy the "contradiction" strategy. God's inability to create a four-sided triangle, alter a past event, or paint a genuine Picasso, could likewise be explained without diminishing God's omnipotence. If the ability to perfectly predict the results of a human free choice is similarly logically contradictory, then it could be argued that "omniscience" should be understood so as to exclude this ability. I have deep sympathies with the contradiction strategy, not the least of which is the fact that this line of thought concurs with, and does not contradict, the conclusion of my overall argument in this essay. An attempt to reconcile human freedom with God's omniscience by altering the meaning of "omniscience," preventing God from attempting to perfectly predict human behavior, is in harmony with the objective of my incompatibilist argument.

The "Thomistic" strategy similarly suggests an alternative definition of "omniscience." God's omniscience does not imply that God could know what P does prior to P's decision, according to Aquinas, because God's knowledge, like God himself, does not exist in time. In order for God to know what P does prior to P's decision, God would have to know P's behavior at some time prior to P's decision. But that amounts to saying that God has knowledge at some time T, which, according to Aquinas, cannot be the case, since God's knowledge exists eternally, beyond time. This Thomistic strategy is designed, like the Ockhamist strategy, to work against incompatibilist arguments which contain a premise of the form N.

But as I have already shown above, my incompatibilist argument does not contain, explicitly or tacitly, any such premise. On my argument, God's omniscience only implies that God *could* know human behavior beforehand. I have no quarrel with eternity; but I invite those who would use divine eternity as a counter-defense against my argument to try to explain why God is constitutionally prevented from making predictions at specific times about future events. The interpretation of certain Biblical passages aside, it still seems odd to deny to God that power. A Thomist or any other

theologian could reply that the best way to understand God's omniscience is to define it carefully so that it denies that God possesses the ability to know human behavior beforehand. This redefinition strategy indeed preserves free will and does not contradict the validity of my incompatibilist argument, and so has my blessing.

Just as the contradictory strategy collapses into harmony with my incompatibilist argument, so too has the Thomist strategy. Perhaps such efforts to redefine God's omniscience face insurmountable theological difficulties, but that is not my battle. It also remains a possibility that belief in God's omniscience should be abandoned in order to retain on "open universe" of real possibilities and genuine free will.