

The Providential Usefulness of “Simple Foreknowledge”

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I. Introduction

Many philosophers and theologians have accepted the following set of theses about providence, foreknowledge, and human freedom: (i) libertarianism, (ii) divine everlastingness, and (iii) complete divine knowledge of what is, to us, the future.

Libertarianism is the thesis that, at least in the most foundational cases of free choice, we are not determined to choose as we do — not by physical or psychological conditions in place prior to the time of choice, nor by divine decree. Divine everlastingness is the doctrine that God’s eternity consists not in a timeless mode of existence, but rather in God’s having always existed throughout a past that has no beginning. Obviously, when an everlasting deity possesses complete knowledge of our future, this constitutes complete foreknowledge; and one might call the combination Libertarian Foreknowledge.

Alternatives to this package include: Open Theism, which rejects (iii); Divine Timelessness, which rejects (ii); and Theological Determinism, which rejects (i). It is my impression that, among Christian philosophers today, each of these three doctrines is less popular than Libertarian Foreknowledge. (I also suspect that this is due, in no small part, to Alvin Plantinga’s defense of libertarianism and of its compatibility with foreknowledge; and also to his argument that Divine Timelessness does not help to reconcile our freedom with God’s knowledge of what we will do.)

Defenders of Libertarian Foreknowledge are divided into those who do, and those who do not, accept Molinism. (And I am quite sure that Plantinga’s defense and

development of a Molinist position has much to do with its popularity.) Molinism is a doctrine about the way in which God's complete foreknowledge works, and the means by which God exercises providential control. The Molinist posits contingently true conditionals about what every possible individual would or will freely do, if put in various circumstances. (These conditionals can describe specific individuals, if our haecceities precede our existence; they have to be about individual-types if, as Adams and Prior argue, existence precedes essence.¹) The circumstances in question are indeterministic ones, since Molinists are libertarians; if a creature is really free in a given set of circumstances, then the laws of nature and prior states of the world do not determine which among a number of alternatives is chosen. The point of positing such conditionals is to explain how God can know, in advance what free creatures will do; and to afford God absolute, "risk free" providential control. God must know the end from the beginning; and the Molinist's conditionals put God in a position to make an initial creative choice among all the possible ways of initiating a world with free creatures, while knowing in advance what would happen on each alternative. So long as God also arrives at settled intentions about what to do when free creatures do what they will do, all of the future is deducible by God from the initial choice of a world-type and the truth of the conditionals describing what everyone would do under every possible circumstance.

I shall call the Molinist's conditionals "conditionals of freedom", or "CFs" — without foreclosing the question whether one should call them counterfactuals (though some are not contrary-to-fact), subjunctives, indicative conditionals, or material conditionals (some philosophers say the latter two are not to be distinguished).

“Simple Foreknowledge” is a good name for the combination of Libertarian Foreknowledge and the *rejection* of Molinism: God did *not* know CFs about free creatures, at least not in such a way that they could be used to explain why he chose to create particular individuals and put them in their actual circumstances. In a series of important papers, David Hunt has argued that Simple Foreknowledge is a coherent and attractive philosophico-theological position.² Some of Hunt’s critics have leveled general objections to Simple Foreknowledge.³ Others have criticized his claim that, if Simple Foreknowledge were true, God would have providential advantages that would not be available, were Open Theism true.⁴ Hunt’s replies to all these critics have been impressive. Although I remain convinced by arguments that complete foreknowledge and libertarianism together imply that we are never free, I see the cogency of his responses to those who claim that God could not rationally or freely make choices while possessing complete foreknowledge. And he has persuaded me that Simple Foreknowledge would allow for providential advantages not included in the Open Theist picture.⁵ Much of this paper simply records my reluctant journey toward these conclusions.

I sketch the Simple Foreknowledge view, noting how it evades certain objections and comparing it to rival accounts of foreknowledge. Along the way, I provide a framework for thinking about the way in which God’s complete foreknowledge would have to be structured — a framework that will, I hope, prove congenial to all believers in the doctrine: Molinists, Divine Determinists, and the defenders of Simple Foreknowledge alike. I point out that Simple Foreknowledge requires that God be able to make choices about the structure of foreknowledge itself; and that, unlike Molinists and

Divine Determinists, advocates of Simple Foreknowledge must allow that God “took risks” in creating genuinely free beings (a conclusion Hunt would accept). Finally, I argue that there are certain kinds of access to foreknowledge that would be highly useful, and that might *seem* to be possible, but that must ultimately be banned because of Simple Foreknowledge’s rejection of Molinism.

II. The Failure of Arguments Based on Doxastic Principles

Hunt usefully divides objections to Simple Foreknowledge into ones that are based on some kind of “doxastic principle” and ones based on a “metaphysical principle”. I shall agree with Hunt that typical objections based on doxastic principles are not terribly compelling.

Doxastic principles like these would obviously make trouble for the advocate of Simple Foreknowledge:

(DP1) Once one knows that p , it is too late to deliberate about whether to make it the case that p ; and, if it is too late to deliberate, it is too late to freely choose.

(DP2) One cannot rationally choose to make it the case that p — that is, one cannot have a good reason for making it the case that p , and choose to do so for that reason — if one already knows that it is a fact that p .

Each claim may be somewhat plausible; but I agree with Hunt that these kinds of doxastic principles do not provide convincing objections to the idea of free, rational action with complete foreknowledge.

A God with foreknowledge is rather like a time traveler who circles back and meets herself — they have a surprising amount of information about what they will do before they do it. The time traveler’s younger self saw her time traveling older self doing certain things, and then, after time traveling, she remembers what she is about to do. Such an experience would no doubt tie a person in deliberative knots! But one can tell stories in which it seems that such a time traveler could indeed choose to do things for good reasons, despite the fact that she clearly remembers doing these things, falsifying (DP1) and (DP2).

(DP1) is certainly questionable. There is no obstacle to the time traveler’s rehearsing various reasons for and against doing something, despite the fact that she remembers seeing herself do it and so knows that she will. Would such inner rehearsal count as deliberation? It is not crystal clear to me that it would not. Perhaps she could even coherently and truthfully say:

I considered whether or not to jump into the river to rescue the drowning man; and although, all along, I knew that I would do it (I distinctly remember, as a young girl, seeing my time traveling older self diving into the river), and although I suppose I could have reasoned fatalistically, thinking, “Well, I might as well do it, just to go along with the flow of history”, in fact that is not why I did it. I did it out of concern for the victim. One often has several beliefs that *could* serve as a

reason to do something, but not all of them need be the actual reason for which one acts.

Although it is tempting to say that rehearsing reasons to do various things while knowing what choice one will make does not count as deliberation; still, it seems possible that this time traveling hero's report is perfectly accurate: she took a free choice for good reasons. That is more important than whether her rehearsal of reasons counts as deliberation; and, if she could be right, then (DP1) is false.

(DP2) seems wrong for a couple of reasons. The first is not so helpful to the defender of divine foreknowledge. Our time traveler might worry that, were she to choose to do something other than what she remembers having seen herself do, she would make it the case that contradictions are true, and then all hell would break loose (or, like the characters in the movie *Dogma*, she might worry that making contradictions true would cause everything to cease to exist). If a person could rationally believe such a thing (a big "if"!), she would have a good reason for doing what she remembers doing, and it would be a reason that crucially includes her knowledge that it is what she will do. Less radically, one might imagine that our time traveler is simply a very passive person, someone who never wants to rock the boat. The fact that she knows that she did something at such-and-such time and place might be seen by her as a sufficiently good reason to do it.

But of course we do not want to suppose that God makes use of foreknowledge in either sort of way. The desire not to make contradictions true, or a passive intention to do the inevitable might be able to serve as partial explanations for human actions, but each

leaves the time traveler unable to provide a truly rational explanation (in the first case) or a very deep explanation (in the second) for her choice. One may grant that an omniscient being *could* decide to bring something about in light of his foreknowledge that he would do so — one could grant that there is no demonstrable incoherence in the idea, an impossibility springing from the very nature of knowledge, deliberation, reasons, and choices. Nevertheless, for *God* to do so would be highly problematic, for it would leave God unable fully to explain why he chose as he did. Fortunately, for the defender of foreknowledge, the story above, about the heroic time traveler who dives into the water to save a man, feels like a very different sort of case: she seems to be acting for a good reason while all the while knowing it is what she will do. The time traveler, in effect, “brackets” her knowledge of what will happen, and manages to act spontaneously on the basis of her feelings of compassion and concern, despite knowing, “in the back of her mind”, that she will do so.

Limits on the Use of Foreknowledge

I set to one side, then, sweeping objections to Simple Foreknowledge based on doxastic principles. More plausible piecemeal objections have been made to the coherence of God’s using certain *parts* of his foreknowledge to explain certain *parts* of his overall creative choice. Hunt calls the principle at the back of these objections the “Metaphysical Principle”, and articulates it in this way:

(MP) It is impossible that a decision depend on a belief which depends on a future event which depends on the original decision.⁶

Hunt does not want to say that such situations are absolutely impossible; but he is willing to grant the truth of (MP), or at least the truth of a version of (MP) restricted to God's decisions and beliefs.⁷ God's decisions could not be rationally explicable in terms of certain beliefs that God has if God has those beliefs because certain future events will occur, *and those events in turn are caused by the original decision*. Basically, the problem with such a scenario is that a circular explanation of this sort would not be a good explanation.

Again, comparing God with a time traveler will help clarify which uses of foreknowledge would be problematic and which would not. A deity with foreknowledge and a time traveler using her knowledge about what will happen both have unusual knowledge about the future, including knowledge of what they themselves will do. Ordinary folks can have knowledge of the future, of course; and sometimes one can even know that such-and-such is going to happen, and use this knowledge as a reason to make such-and-such happen, without paradox. Suppose I know that there's going to be a nuclear war, not because I come from the post-apocalyptic future but because I know a chain of events has begun that would lead to North Korean missiles being launched in one hour; and I can launch ours in five minutes. This is unparadoxical knowledge that something will be the case which I can then use as part of my reason for making it to be the case; I know there will be a nuclear war one way or another, and I decide to let it be a war caused by the U.S. Some uses of a time traveler's knowledge lead to much more paradoxical situations. Suppose there isn't another potential cause of nuclear war waiting in the wings, and I know there will be one because I'm a time traveler who just arrived

from “beyond the Thunderdome”. And this leads me to say, what the heck, if there’s going to be a nuclear war, it might as well be the other side that gets the worst of it, and I push the button. Why is there a nuclear war? Because I push the button. Why do I push the button? Because there will be a nuclear war. Why does the entire causal loop occur? No explanation.

A setting can be concocted in which I am a time traveler with knowledge of the war, but I still cause it for adequate reasons (well, at least for reasons that make it rational for me, in some narrow, internalist sense of rationality). Suppose my choice to push the button were the end result of a process with a certain amount of indeterminism mixed into it precisely to the libertarian’s specifications (whatever exactly those should be); and suppose that the process also includes whatever other bells and whistles we libertarians might want in responsible action (e.g., agent causation). If I have absolutely no reason to push the button, the choice may be a free one, but it is “random”, taken on impulse; if I know it is a weighty choice that should not be taken without a reason, then to do it impulsively would be irrational. But suppose instead that I have a love of the Mad Max movies, and want to make the future as they depict it. If that is my reason, the choice to push the button is not completely irrational — I do it in pursuit of a goal, however deplorable. But if I have this reason, and am still not sure whether to push the button until I recall that my visit to the future revealed a post-apocalyptic landscape, and I then say, oh, what the heck, it’s going to happen anyway... Well, in that case, the desire for a Mad-Max-style future has had its rationalizing efficacy drained away. Despite my having an independent reason upon which I could have acted, if it is my foreknowledge that really pushes me over the edge, it becomes true that I do it because I do it.

However, if I can somehow set my foreknowledge to one side, saying, “No, I’m not pushing the button because I know that the future contains the results of my pushing it; I’m pushing it because I want to live like Mad Max”; then I am saying, in effect, “I should take this choice even without the knowledge that it’s what I will do.” So, either the information I bring from the future is not part of my reason for acting, or my choice and the events I bring about remain fundamentally unexplained.

To make my time traveling situation even more like that of divine foreknowledge, imagine that I hire someone to accompany and videotape the actions of the older me who comes from the future; and that I watch the tapes (on fast forward) before I return to the past so that I have fresh memories of what I will do; or that I bring the tapes with me into the past, and consult them as needed when memory fails. If my time traveling older self does something in part because the video tape refreshes his memory of having seen himself do it, then there’s a causal-explanatory loop that leaves both things unexplained: (a) the occurrence of my choice and (b) the memory that causes and is caused by that choice. We can suppose I have libertarian freedom when making the choice; in that case, there is never a fully deterministic causal explanation for the decision, even in the absence of an explanatory loop engendered by time travel. Still, something *more* goes unexplained than in the normal case of free action. Normally, I should at least be able to cite independent reasons that “incline without necessitating”. The reason my time-traveling self gives for my choice includes a fact that is due to the choice I will make; the fact cited as explaining the choice is causally dependent upon that choice’s being made.

So long as we can wrap our minds round causal-explanatory loops, and the resulting breaches in the principle of sufficient reason, there need be nothing out-and-out

impossible about these scenarios. There are consistent time travel stories, after all. And a human being's powers of self-determination are not so exalted that we should balk at the very idea of one's being unable to explain one's actions — we do sometimes just “find ourselves” making choices, sometimes momentous choices, without much explanation why; and a time traveler has simply wound up in a situation where that can easily happen to him or her. But in God's case, it is impious to suppose God is unable to explain why he makes momentous choices. If the fact that he knows that a world will exist could somehow be cited by God as part of his reason for going ahead and creating a world, then his creating a world when he was free not to is left as a contingent fact without further explanation. If he is deciding whether or not to create Adam and Eve, and part of his reason for creating them is that he knows they will exist, then again the entire loop of his causing them, their existing, and his knowing they will exist is an unexplained surd. One cannot say that this bit of foreknowledge was relevant to his decision, but then go on to say that he chose the whole loop for some *further* reason, one that was *not* dependent upon his knowledge that Adam and Eve would exist. By hypothesis, there was an explanatory loop within God's choices and foreknowledge; but it ceases to be a loop if one also affirms that he chose that each part of the loop should exist for reasons independent of the events in the loop — in that case, his decision to create Adam and Eve was *not* based upon his knowledge that they would exist, and his foreknowledge was not being used after all.

Acceptance of (MP), or at least acceptance that God would not allow his own knowledge and decisions to introduce failures of (MP), leaves the basic Simple Foreknowledge scenario intact: God knew what he would do although he did not use this

information as a reason for doing it, but instead chose what to do for other, better reasons that he also had.

Now, (MP) is rather imprecise (Hunt was merely trying to articulate the intuitions behind some of the objections raised by his critics, so this is not to fault Hunt). For instance, does it rule out this sort of situation? A time traveler recalls witnessing, as a young woman, a conversation between her time traveling older self and a pawnbroker. She remembers that the pawnbroker answered “yes” to a question posed by the time traveler. The time traveler has by now forgotten or at least put out of her mind the precise nature of the question she asked. But, given her current desire to purchase a guitar for less than the asking price of \$100, and her knowledge that the next thing the pawnbroker will say is “yes”, she asks whether he’ll take \$90; and she buys the guitar. Does this constitute a violation of (MP)? Not obviously. Suppose the pawnbroker was deliriously happy then, and would say “yes!” to anything; or suppose the pawnbroker was distracted, and although he might answer “yes” or “no” (and might even be free to choose which it would be), the question itself wouldn’t matter. In one sense, the whole transaction, including the pawnbroker’s answer, is an event that is caused by a belief that is caused by the event — violating (MP). But one should not allow too much to count as part of the event, lest even the most non-paradoxical uses of foreknowledge will be ruled out. In this case, the event to focus on would seem to be the time traveler’s choice of a question; and, so long as the pawnbroker’s answer is not dependent upon what that question is, no invidious circle emerges. (At the end of the paper, I consider a similar case of divine use of foreknowledge.)

A Theory of the Stages in God's Foreknowledge

How should we understand the idea of “purging” or “bracketing” parts of the divine foreknowledge so as to preserve God’s ability to explain his choices? One simple-minded analogy appeals to what happens to *us* when things that we know slip our mind. If what is in fact knowledge that you will do *A* can be forgotten or ignored or bracketed somehow, then it becomes possible once again for you to choose between doing *A* and not doing *A* for reasons you have that are independent of your knowledge that you will do *A*. In the story of my time traveling, one might add that I become tired of slavishly doing what the tapes say, and set them aside, putting my memories out of my mind as well; I seek, instead, to “live in the moment”, basing my decisions upon reasons I have that are independent of my foreknowledge. Similarly, although God always knows everything, he can (the advocate of foreknowledge must suppose) ignore or somehow bracket parts of what he knows.

Hunt suggests that the “bracketing” of a part of God’s foreknowledge can be understood by analogy with these sorts of cases, which seem to turn upon the distinction between *dispositional* and *occurrent* belief.⁸ (He also appeals to a very similar distinction between “accessed” and “unaccessed” information stored in a computer; accessing stored information is like a dispositional belief becoming an occurrent belief.⁹) It may be hard to imagine believing, consciously and with absolute certainty, that one will do something; and *then*, while still consciously believing this, *deciding* to do it. It is not nearly so puzzling to suppose that someone rationally and deliberately chooses to do something while merely having the dispositional belief that she will do it. An unproblematic case is a time traveler who deliberates about whether to jump in a river to

help someone, briefly failing to recall that she knows perfectly well that she will indeed do so — she has a vivid memory of the event that has slipped her mind in all the excitement and stress of her present experience, but it could be called up at a moment's notice. The example is problematic as a model for God's foreknowledge, since this sort of foreknowing deliberator "exhibits a very undivine deficiency", as Hunt puts it: a brief inability to remember what she would do. But is accidental forgetfulness the only possible way to ignore information in order to deliberate or decide? Or "could a person deliberately (and not just inadvertently) disregard his doxastic commitments?" We may not have such control of our own thoughts, but perhaps a more disciplined mind could do so. And if it is possible, then "actually doing so for an adequate reason would not exhibit an obvious defect."¹⁰

I agree with Hunt that the dispositional–occurrent distinction is a promising starting point for understanding the idea of God's knowledge being "bracketed". But I have reservations about Hunt's implementation. As I understand him, Hunt wants to say that God's knowledge of what he will freely choose to do at various times in history remains dispositional until enough of history has occurred to justify that choice. In one of Hunt's examples, knowledge of what Hitler will decide on a certain day is used by God to aid the Allies in circumstances prior to Hitler's decision. Foreknowledge of Hitler's decision is "accessed" (i.e., becomes occurrent) only when history has reached the point at which it is clear that God would "maximize providential control" by accessing this information¹¹ — rather than some other piece of information that could not be accessed together with knowledge of Hitler's decision. If I read him aright, Hunt's view implies that God's foreknowledge that he would ban Adam from the Garden of

Eden did not become an occurrent thought until after Adam sinned. Why, on Hunt's picture of things, did it take God such a long time to occurrently believe that he would banish Adam after Adam's free choice? If God could have had the occurrent belief earlier, but just did not bother to do so, Hunt's remarks would simply be speculation about the times at which God's dispositional beliefs became occurrent. I take him to be saying, rather, that the belief about banishing Adam, for instance, could not have become occurrent until the choice was made. But it is a Pickwickian sort of "dispositional belief" that can be possessed throughout a long period during which it cannot be brought to mind — a dispositional belief possessed by someone who, by ordinary standards, lacks the disposition to believe it in the full-blown, occurrent way.

Here is a way for Hunt to make use of the dispositional–occurrent distinction to explain how God freely decides what to do while all along foreknowing what he will do: Hunt could relativize the notion of a dispositional and occurrent belief not to times, but rather to decisions based upon them. Relative to the decision whether to allow Adam to be tempted in a garden, God's belief that he would banish Adam from a garden must be merely dispositional, unaccessed, "bracketed". But relative to God's belief that he would speak to Cain and Adam at a location outside the Garden of Eden, God's belief that he banished Adam must be occurrent, since it partially explains God's further interactions with Adam and his descendants.

Defining "Stages" in God's Foreknowledge

Whatever the best way to make sense of "bracketing", the defender of complete foreknowledge must say that God's beliefs about God's own choices, although they do

not temporally succeed his choices about what to do, nevertheless come later in some other sense — they are “higher up” in an explanatory hierarchy that orders the propositions God knows. Anything that God knows that could be considered while choosing something comes prior, in an explanatory ordering of God’s foreknowledge, to the knowledge that that is what he will choose. This thought suggests a way of defining the notion of a *stage* in God’s foreknowledge.

I will suppose that what God chooses is whether or not to make certain propositions true, though I feel sure the basic ideas could be transferred to other ways of construing God’s choices and actions. I shall assume that some of the propositions God makes true are chosen on the basis of the same set of reasons; these are the choices that will mark a division in God’s foreknowledge.

Not every proposition made true by God’s action will be based upon a single set of reasons. Here is an example involving a pair of propositions, each individually made true by God, although their conjunction is not made true on the basis of a single body of information, and so could not constitute a division between stages. Let p be the proposition that Adam is placed in a garden, and q the proposition that Adam is banished from the garden. The conjunction of these two is true because of God’s action; but making $p \& q$ true will not, on the Simple Foreknowledge view, count as a divine decision that divides stages. On the Simple Foreknowledge picture of things, the choice to make p true is taken without God’s “yet” having accessed information about Adam’s sin, while q is chosen with full knowledge of what Adam did. So some propositions that God makes true will mark natural “breaks” within God’s knowledge; they are decisions chosen together in light of a single stage, a complete set of foreknown propositions that provided

reasons making the propositions true. Other propositions that God makes true will not mark natural breaks of this sort. Here is an attempt at defining the notion a little more precisely:

(D1) God's decision to make p true marks a natural break in God's foreknowledge =_{df} God decides to make p true, and there are no propositions q and r such that: (i) God decides to make q and r true, (ii) necessarily, if q and r are true, then so is p , (iii) God makes p true by making q and r true, and (iv) the part of God's foreknowledge that could have been taken into account in the decision to make q true is distinct from the part that could have been taken into account in the decision to make r true.

I am not sure what is the best way into the circle of ideas that includes: stages of foreknowledge, divine decisions that mark a natural break, and foreknown propositions that could be taken into account when deciding to make a proposition true. I have tried to define the second in terms of the third; and shall suggest a way to define the first in terms of the second and third. The defender of foreknowledge might try to define "stage in God's foreknowledge", relative to a particular choice on God's part, along these lines:

(D2) S is the stage in God's knowledge prior to his choice to make p true =_{df} God decided to bring about the truth of p ; the decision to make p true falls within a natural break in God's foreknowledge; and, for any proposition q that God knows,

q is a member of S iff q could have been taken into account in God's decision to make p true.

Some choices will be the sole choice or largest choice dividing parts of God's foreknowledge, including the making-true of all the propositions that are chosen on the same basis; while other choices will be aimed at just one of many propositions made true based on the same portion of God's foreknowledge. The variable p in the definition above can be replaced by propositions that yield larger or smaller choices.

One might worry that (D2) is unable to place in their proper order those parts of God's foreknowledge that are not relevant to a certain decision. Stages are supposed to reflect the order of explanatory priority, and one should like to say that knowledge of necessary truths is prior to knowledge of all contingent ones (at least this doctrine has been widely held by defenders of complete foreknowledge). But suppose some necessary truth — say, a theorem of Euclidean geometry — is strictly irrelevant to God's choice to create Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga does not inhabit a universe in which space is actually Euclidean, and it might even be a *necessary truth* that Plantinga does not (if a being of his type could not exist in a universe with quite different physical laws). In the latter case, it would be particularly hard to see the relevance of any such theorem to the decision to create Plantinga. But then, if the theorem is so far “off topic” that it *could not* have been taken into account in deciding whether to create Plantinga, (D2) would seem to imply that it is not part of what God knew prior to the decision to create Plantinga. Similar problems for (D2) can be raised by contingent truths that, for various reasons, really ought to be explanatorily prior to some choice even though they are irrelevant to it; while

other irrelevancies that ultimately depend upon the choice should *not* be explanatorily prior to it.

This worry could quite plausibly be dismissed by pointing out that even irrelevancies may properly be said to have been “taken into account” when making a decision, if one explicitly (i.e., occurrently) thinks about them and judges them to have no bearing one way or the other upon the decision. If the occurrent–dispositional distinction can be used to illuminate the differences between stages of God’s foreknowledge, I don’t see why this kind of “taking into account” of irrelevancies should not be allowed; in that case, (D2) would be able to place some irrelevant propositions before a certain divine choice, and other irrelevant propositions after the choice.

Principles Governing Stages

It would be nice if we could simply assume that explanatory priority is transitive, asymmetrical, and irreflexive; and that the stages in God’s foreknowledge are totally ordered by this relation — for every pair of distinct stages, one must come before the other in the hierarchy of explanatory priority. A really thorough examination of foreknowledge would explore weaker assumptions; I shall simply scratch the surface here.

Stages are introduced to avoid causal-explanatory circularities. Suppose God created two causally disconnected universes, *A* and *B*, and that God had resolved that how things developed in *B* would not affect his decisions about *A*, and vice versa. In that case, information about what happens throughout the history of *A* could be added to stages prior to decisions about *B*, and vice versa, with no danger of thereby introducing

causal-explanatory loops. If nothing going on in the one universe is relevant to God's decisions about what happens in the other, *all* the facts about the history of the one could be taken into account in all God's dealings with the other. If the decision to create *A* and *B* was based upon the same part of God's foreknowledge (say, just necessary truths) then God's foreknowledge about what happens in *A* would be divided up into stages relative to God's decisions about how to interact with *A*, but not divided into stages relative to God's decisions about *B*. Explanatory priority among stages must be relativized somehow, so that facts about *A* can be prior to facts about *B*, and facts about *B* can also be prior to facts about *A*. It seems natural to describe the divine creative choices, with respect to *A* and *B*, as consisting of two "streams" of decisions. All foreknowledge of the stream of decisions about *A* (and their consequences within *A*) would come immediately after the decision to create the two universes, relative to the stream of decisions about *B*; but that same foreknowledge would be divided up into distinct stages relative to the stream of decisions about *A*. And the same would be true, with *A* and *B* reversed.¹²

I hope to sidestep the issue of whether multiple streams are indeed possible by restricting attention to the explanatory structure of God's foreknowledge relative to just one stream of decisions. A continuous part of a stream of decisions is a series that includes all the choices falling between other choices in the series.

(D3) A series of divine decisions to bring about the truth of *p*, *q*, *r*, etc. constitutes a continuous part of a single stream =_{df} (i) each of *p*, *q*, *r*, etc. marks a natural break, a decision God takes all at once; (ii) the stage of God's foreknowledge immediately prior to an earlier member in the series is always a proper subset of

the stage immediately prior to any later member; and (iii) for any divine decision to bring it about that s is true, if s marks a natural break, and the stage immediately prior to the decision is a proper subset of one of the stages before the decisions to bring about the truth of p , or q , or r , etc., then the decision to make s true is also a member of the series.

The definition takes for granted that:

(P1) If stage S1 is earlier than stage S2 in a continuous single stream, then S1 is a proper subset of S2.

The principle implies that, if a divine decision is based upon a certain part of God's foreknowledge, and this decision makes it possible for God to make further divine decisions based upon new parts of his foreknowledge (propositions God knows that at least partly depend, for their truth, upon that decision), then in making these further decisions God could take into account the new information *plus* all of the old foreknowledge informing the original decision. **To deny this would be to invite breaches of (MP). (Is that right?)**

Stages According to Theological Determinists, Molinists, and "Risky" Theists

I take it to be relatively uncontroversial, among philosophical defenders of complete divine foreknowledge, that God's foreknowledge displays a hierarchical structure including the basic notions I have been trying to organize. Some divine decisions are

taken for reasons that can include only parts of God’s foreknowledge, and a relation of explanatory priority holds between propositions God took account of in making a decision, and propositions that depend for their truth upon that decision. Indeed, most believers in complete divine foreknowledge say things that commit them to views consistent with a very simple stage structure satisfying these constraints, with no need for relativizing to streams.

To keep things manageable, I will assume that there is a “first family” of free creatures, and that the only events not determined by God’s choices are the choices of free creatures. Everything else is determined by initial conditions, laws of nature, and divine intervention — all of which will be the result of God’s explicit decrees.¹³

Calvinists and other theological determinists should readily agree that there are stages in God’s knowledge. They merely need two: (i) God’s knowledge prior to his choice of a complete world, which is his knowledge purged of the truths that depend upon his choice of a world — so, presumably, little more than necessary truths; and (ii) God’s knowledge of everything, which follows hard upon his choice of a complete history for the world, including every choice ever made by anyone.

Theological Determinism: There are two stages in God’s knowledge. Stage 1 consists of just necessary truths, and Stage 2 contains everything else. The two stages are separated by God’s determination of everything that ever happens.

Libertarians posit a more complicated picture according to which some contingent truths are not completely up to God; for example, he cannot simply decide to *make you*

freely do anything he likes. If there are true CFs about what we would do in various circumstances, God cannot *make* these true, for the same reason. If he did, since he also puts us in our circumstances, he would be doing something the libertarian deems impossible: making us freely do whatever he chooses. Thus, if the Molinists are right, and CFs are true and available for God to consider when deciding whether and what to create, then they come at stages prior to God's creative decisions — presumably, they are there from the earliest stages. (Molina placed them “after” the necessary truths; but the notion of explanatory priority I am using is a little more coarse-grained.)

Molinism: There are two stages in God's knowledge. Stage 1 contains two parts: (a) necessary truths, and (b) conditionals of freedom specifying what each possible free creature would freely do under highly detailed conditions of free choice; God's knowledge of (b) is in some sense posterior to (a), but both are known from all eternity and prior to any creative decisions. Stage 2 contains everything else. The two stages are separated by God's deciding: (i) what the world should be like prior to any free decisions by creatures, and (ii) how he will respond when the time comes to “fill in” the parts of the world that come after their free decisions.

On one interpretation, Simple Foreknowledge posits a more complicated stage structure. Suppose God has decided to create Adam and Eve after so many years of universe-building. Rejection of Molinism implies that there is no fact of the matter about what they *would* do if allowed to act freely in those circumstances — at least, no fact that is explanatorily prior to the fact that they *are* put in those circumstances, and that they *do*

freely choose such-and-such course of action. So, in deciding whether to create them and put them in circumstances of free choice, God bases his decision upon a stage of his foreknowledge that does not include information about what they will do — that is to say, God takes a risk in creating them and leaving them free. Since God does decide to create them and put them in particular circumstances of choice, there is a fact about what they freely do, and it must be part of God's foreknowledge. But at what stage does the knowledge come? The decision to allow them to make free choices under precise circumstances must lead to a new stage in God's foreknowledge, containing at least the proposition that God decides to allow this. Does God automatically know, as part of the same stage, know that they freely sin (for example)? Or could there be a stage posterior to the decision that includes the fact that God put them in these circumstances but nothing about the outcome, leaving further divine decisions possible between that stage and a stage that includes propositions describing what they freely do? These are tricky questions that will be addressed shortly. But God's foreknowledge of what they do must appear at some stage, and it must be later than God's decision to allow them to choose, on pain of explanatory circles that would rob God of reasons for creating Adam and Eve at all.

Roughly, then, the Simple Foreknowledge picture of stage structure that I am suggesting would go like this: At some stage, God's foreknowledge includes the proposition that Adam and Eve freely sin in such-and-such circumstances; but this can only come after God's decisions and knowledge include enough to entail that Adam and Eve *will exist* in such-and-such circumstances. On the basis of the added knowledge about what they do, God chooses to throw them out of the Garden of Eden; whereupon

they find themselves in further circumstances of free choice. Once again, stages that do not include God's throwing them out cannot contain the proposition that they freely do this or that in circumstances that include recently having been thrown out of the Garden of Eden. So only stages explanatorily posterior to God's decision can include the facts about what they freely do — more risks on God's part.

On this "Many-Stage" version of Simple Foreknowledge, God should not be thought, prior to S, to have issued an infinity of conditional decrees, specifying all the things God will bring about under every possible outcome of free choices on the part of Adam, Eve, and every other free creature that could possibly come into being in the future. So long as God was free to respond to Adam and Eve in various ways, stages prior to S do not (on the Many-Stage version) include facts about which response God decides to make. (Later, a "Two-Stage" version of Simple Foreknowledge will be mentioned; but it is one within which a mirror image of the hierarchy of stages appears, so that the difference is not, ultimately, a very deep one.)

If this is how stages are constructed, foreknowledge of what certain creatures will freely do in certain circumstances would not help God to decide whether to put the creatures in those circumstances; knowledge of their choice does not appear in stages before God has decided to allow them to enter into those circumstances. God is, from eternity, responding to what creatures freely do, and he cannot use information about what they'll freely do when deciding whether to put them in certain circumstances. To sum up:

Many-Stages Simple Foreknowledge: There are many stages in God's knowledge. Stage 1 contains just necessary truths. Stage 2 adds all the contingent facts about creation prior to the introduction of any free creatures. 1 and 2 are separated by God's decision to create a world with such-and-such initial segment leading up to free creatures. Stage 2 *also* contains God's foreknowledge about what initial free choices are made. After 2, God decides what the world should be like up until their next free choices, which generates Stage 3. And so on.

I have imagined God's decisions about how to respond to the freely taken choices of his creatures as divine acts or decrees that are themselves only taken at stages posterior to the creatures' choices. Hunt suggests a different model, according to which God forms an infinity of conditional intentions, deciding upon them *along with* his decree to create a universe leading up to Adam and Eve.¹⁴ Before knowing what they will do, God decides what to do if they sin (namely, throw them out of the garden) and what to do if they do not (give them a new animal to name, say); what to do if they both continue to sin after being thrown out of the garden (provide steps they can take to repent of their sin); and what to do if they both passed the first occasion of temptation, but are then tempted again in a different way, and fall into sin; and so on, not only for Adam and Eve but for all their actual and merely possible descendants, in all actual and merely possible histories in which their free choices could be embedded.

The defender of Simple Foreknowledge who supposes God makes all these conditional propositions true while also deciding what conditions will lead up to the first free choices need only posit two stages in God's foreknowledge.

Two-Stage Simple Foreknowledge: There need only be two stages in God's

foreknowledge, the first consisting of just necessary truths, the second including everything God foreknows. The two are separated by a single divine decision with two distinct parts: (i) God's decision to create a world with such-and-such initial segment leading up to free creatures; and (ii) God's decisions about how to respond to every possible free choice they might make in their initial circumstances, and every possible free choice they might be faced with next, and so on...including all the responses God would give to actual and potential future free creatures in any world that begins with this initial segment and develops in a way allowed by God's conditional intentions.

Both Two-Stage and Many-Stage versions of Simple Foreknowledge depict God as subject to risk. God chooses to create a universe with free creatures on the basis of a part of the divine foreknowledge that does not include knowledge of what they will do. And the Two-Stage version differs little from the Many-Stage version in another way: the true antecedents of the conditionals God actually acts upon will look just like the stages of the Many-Stage view. They can be ordered into something like "streams" if there are two series of conditional intentions with antecedents the truth of which is independent of the members of the other series. The true antecedents will also be ordered

like stages within God's foreknowledge. Take some antecedent, p , in a conditional upon which God acts so as to bring about the truth of q . Suppose p is true in virtue of facts that include God's having brought about the truth of r . Let s be the antecedent of the conditional intention with r for consequent. s 's truth had better not be dependent upon God's having brought about the truth of q , on pain of a nasty circle of causal-explanatory dependence. (MP) will enforce an ordering of the conditionals upon which God acts (at least orderings for independent streams of causally-related parts of creation) and each antecedent can be enriched with irrelevant truths, and true antecedents of earlier conditionals in the series. The only real difference between the Two-Stage and Many-Stage models of Simple Foreknowledge is that, on the Many-Stage picture, God must be imagined to issue an infinite number of (as it turns out) unnecessary decrees about circumstances that never come to be. On the Many-Stage picture, God issues decrees about what he will bring about in response to a certain circumstance precisely *because* God knows that the circumstance will come about.

Were I defending Simple Foreknowledge, I should want to be able to say that, although all God's decisions are made earlier than everything we do; nevertheless, God's acts are genuine *responses* to us, in our actual circumstances. If Many-Stages is the correct account, God's choice of a response to my repentance, say, is taken precisely *because* I repent; while, on the Two-Stage view, God's choice of response was a conditional one that was *not based upon knowing that I would repent*. The Two-Stage God seems to me to be "phoning it in" — though I confess that I don't have much confidence in this (perhaps merely aesthetic) judgment. In any case, I believe the

differences do not matter to the arguments to come, in which I will usually assume the Many-Stage view.

A Providential Advantage of Simple Foreknowledge

How many risks does God take, according to the defender of Simple Foreknowledge? Is the view the practical (and, for that matter, moral) equivalent of Open Theism? Do the stages of God's eternal knowledge just mirror the temporal stages in God's knowledge posited by the Open Theist, who, immediately prior to allowing a creature to make a certain free decision, does not know the outcomes of *any* free choices that are temporally posterior to that one? Hunt claims that Simple Foreknowledge would give God providential resources unavailable if Open Theism were true. I shall illustrate the sort of advantages he has in mind by means of the Many-Stage version (they are available in Hunt's Two-Stage model as well). The advantages emerge because Simple Foreknowledge leaves God some choices about what parts of divine foreknowledge shall inform which divine choices. To show how such choices are possible, I develop the notion of "querying the future".

Suppose God decides that he will create Adam and Eve, and allow them to face their first free choices simultaneously in widely separated parts of their garden. Suppose it is a matter of indifference, to God, whether apples or pears are forbidden; and that, as a matter of fact, Eve is tempted with apples, Adam is tempted with apples, and neither succumbs. On the face of it, Simple Foreknowledge allows for three possible stories about why God chose these circumstances of temptation for them. According to story 1, God made the decision to use apples with both Eve and Adam based upon the same stage

in his foreknowledge, a stage that did *not* contain foreknowledge of what either one would do. There are, however, two alternative stories about God's choice of fruit, neither of which violates the metaphysical principle barring circles of explanation.

To set up the alternative stories, I will add some details to the temptation scenario: Suppose the ideal result of the two temptations would be Adam and Eve resisting separate temptations involving *the same type of fruit* (so that only one fruit need be prohibited); and that the worst result would be their succumbing to temptation by means of the same type of fruit (perhaps each will henceforth be attracted to the forbidden fruit he or she ate; in which case they may be better able to help one another resist, in the future, if they are prone to different temptations). According to story 2 (the first of the alternative stories about the explanatory ordering of God's foreknowledge concerning these events), the stage in God's foreknowledge just before the decision to allow that Adam be tempted with apples did not contain foreknowledge about what Eve would do; but God's decision to tempt Eve with apples rather than pears was taken after a later stage, one that included God's knowing that Adam would be tempted with apples and successfully resist temptation. According to story 3 (the second alternative story about the explanatory ordering of foreknowledge), God's decision with respect to Eve's fruit was made "first", and the choice of Adam's fruit was made in light of foreknowledge about what Eve would do. Hunt tells similar (more realistic) stories, and points out that there need be no obvious circularities of dependence involved in them.¹⁵

What *would* violate the prohibition upon explanatory circles would be to suppose that God chose apples for Adam because God knew that he would allow Eve to be tempted by apples and that she would refrain from eating them; and that he also chose

apples for Eve because he knew that he would allow Adam to be tempted with apples and that Adam would refrain as well. Surely *that* is not a coherent story to tell about the explanatory hierarchy of foreknowledge — (MP) would rule it out. There does not, however, seem to be any impossibility hidden in the idea that, given God’s choice to create Adam and Eve, he also has control over whether to choose their temptations independently, or to choose the form of one’s temptation based upon the outcome of the other’s temptation. In the absence of a reason to think it impossible, the advocate of Simple Foreknowledge should suppose that this is the sort of thing that can be chosen by an omnipotent God: he can choose whether to take both decisions “at once”, or to take one “first” and the other “second”, thereby allowing himself to make the latter decision in light of the results of the former.

Given my stipulations about the best and worst outcomes for the temptations of Adam and Eve, stories 2 and 3 represent God as having a means to decrease the risk he has taken in allowing them to be tempted in these circumstances. According to story 1, God runs the risk of the worst outcome: that both are tempted by the same fruit and both fall into sin. On 2 and 3, there is no risk of this happening.

A similar range of alternatives is available within the Two-Stage version of Simple Foreknowledge. God can decree, on the basis of a stage of foreknowledge including just necessary truths, that Adam and Eve be tempted by apples, and issue only the four conditional resolutions with antecedents specifying what to do given each of the four possible outcomes (Eve sins but Adam does not, etc.). God would thereby risk the worst outcome. Alternatively, on the basis of only necessary truths, God could decree that Adam be tempted by apples, and issue the conditional directive: If Adam succumbs,

let Eve be simultaneously tempted with pears; and if Adam resists, let Eve be simultaneously tempted with apples. And, of course, there is the possibility of similar decrees with the roles of Adam and Eve reversed. What God cannot do is to issue *only* conditional decrees, for example: If Adam is tempted with apples and resists, let Eve be tempted with apples; and if Eve is tempted with apples and resists, let Adam be tempted with apples; and if Adam is tempted with apples and succumbs, let Eve be tempted with pears; and if Eve is tempted with apples and succumbs, let Adam be tempted with pears; etc. No one will be tempted to eat anything unless God decrees something more than these merely conditional intentions. According to the Two-Stage Simple Foreknowledge picture, once having chosen a kind of world leading up to free choices, everything else follows, since God will then know the parts of history God leaves up to his creatures.

“Querying the Future”

The defender of Simple Foreknowledge should, I think, be open to an even more deliberate choice about what parts of foreknowledge to use after a certain stage — a kind of “querying of the future” with respect to one question, rather than another that could have been asked instead.

God’s querying the future with respect to p rather than q cannot be a matter of his surveying all the things he knows (i.e., everything) and picking the relevant bit; it must be something like: Choosing to query the future with respect to one sort of fact, but not others; e.g., choosing to know whether or not Adam will sin at some time in the future, but not exactly *how* Adam will sin — something like the case of the time traveler and the

pawnbroker, in which the time traveler made use of her knowledge of who the pawnbroker would answer, but not what the question would be.

Here is a schematic case in which some kind of deliberate querying of the future would be called for:

There is a stage S1 in God's foreknowledge that does not include God's decision whether to make p true, and p is a proposition describing an event that will occur at a time t . There are true propositions q and r that describe some events happening at t^* , well after the choice is made, and neither q nor r is part of S1. Knowing either q or r would help God decide whether to make p true. q and r could each individually be added to S1 to generate a stage S2, after which God decides about p , without violating (MP). But adding both to S1, without God's first deciding whether to make p true, would violate (MP) or produce some similar kind of incoherence.

Such cases can easily arise (I give an example below). Many-Stage Simple Foreknowledge had best be able to make sense of these, and of a special kind of decision that God must make: whether to query the future (or "peek ahead") with respect to the truth of q but not r , or vice versa — whether to add the answer to the question " q or not- q ?" to the contents of a stage, thereby generating a new stage, when he could instead have added the answer to " r or not- r ?" If both ways of structuring the stages of God's foreknowledge are possible, God's omnipotence should imply that he has a choice about the matter; so querying the future in this way must be a special kind of divine decision that can separate stages.

But there are limits to this sort of peeking ahead. The trees represent the history of the world up to a certain point, together with every possible history that might have come about after that point. Each node is an indeterministic fork at which some agent or agents are responsible for the branch that is taken. The disappearance of branches in the move from S_1 to S_2 represents the addition of knowledge about what actually will or would happen at later stages. Suppose S_1 does not include Eve's sinning nor her resisting temptation (on some remaining forks, she does, on others she doesn't), though it does include God's creating her and Adam. Suppose, further, that S_1 does not include Eve's being tempted by a snake with an apple, because God is still deciding about that; he hasn't decided whether he'll prohibit apples or pears. L is a choice on God's part to create and prohibit apples; R is a choice to create and prohibit pears while encouraging the eating of apples. The nodes immediately after the choice between L and R represent Eve's temptation by the snake; on the left hand, the snake tempts her with prohibited apples, on the right with prohibited pears. The time, t , at the top of the diagram is still later, after she will have had opportunity to talk things over with Adam — whether or not she refrained or accepted the fruit.

Consider a providential use of simple foreknowledge much like the case of the time traveler and the pawnbroker: At stage S_1 , God could peek ahead to see whether, at t , Adam will be (freely) taking an apple from Eve and eating it. Let p now represent the proposition that Adam is doing so. The truth of p , given the right hand evolution of the universe, is completely benign; while on the left, p 's truth implies that Eve has sinned and that Adam is at least freely eating fruit that was prohibited for Eve. Peeking, or querying the future, is an action on God's part immediately subsequent to S_1 , and results

in a new state of knowledge, S2. His peeking ahead, past the time at which Eve actually is tempted, leads to the discovery that Adam does accept an apple from Eve at t . This could certainly be useful knowledge, encouraging God to prohibit pears instead of apples — at least that would leave open the possibility that Eve does not succumb to temptation.

Note that when God asks, “What will Adam be doing at t ?”, the answer had better not be a proposition true on only one side of the L-R divide. Suppose the answer were a proposition that is only true on the left side. In that case, creating and prohibiting apples, (God’s left hand choice, L, by hypothesis not made yet — it’s the choice his querying the future is supposed to help decide) would have been torn from his hands; he learned, immediately after stage S1, what he chose to prohibit, *before he actually chose it*.

Perhaps we can fancifully imagine that, when the answer to a query would determine a divine choice not yet taken, the structure of God’s foreknowledge would still contain a divine decision to query the future, but would yield something like the answer a “Magic 8-Ball” often gives: “ask again later”.

To make the example

The fact that querying the future can represent a real decision on God’s part can be seen by spinning out the story further, to generate an example of the schematic sort displayed near the beginning of this section. Suppose there is another query God could put to the future: instead of asking whether Adam is eating apples at t , God could ask whether Adam is sitting down at t . Let r be the proposition that he is seated. Since r is true on both sides, God could learn of its truth before deciding between L and R. But God could not know *both* p and r , since that would entail God’s choosing L. Thus querying the future about such matters must be a real choice on God’s part.

To rule out queryings that produce too much foreknowledge for the stage after which they occur, I propose a further principle about stages:

(P?) If God freely decides to make p true, and the fact that God so decides is not a part of stage S , then, for every querying of the future God could perform immediately after S , every possible answer to the query must be consistent with God's deciding not to make p true.

Simply deciding to put free creatures in free circumstances and then "seeing" (ahead of time) what they'll do is not problematic in the same way: By hypothesis, God doesn't choose what they do, so discovering what they do poses no paradoxes about God's choices being taken from his hands or rendered irrational. Since he has decided to create the creatures and leave them free, stages prior to the point at which God learns of their choices presumably include a good reason to allow them to freely decide in these circumstances.

So far, though, so good: it would appear that God could move from S_1 to S_2 by making selective use of his foreknowledge, so long as p 's truth is consistent with God's choosing either L or R .

The Molinist's Revenge!

Instances of querying the future that do not immediately lead to violations of (MP) may still require something very much like CFs, conditionals that provide God information about what free creatures (and God himself) either would or will do in various non-actual

circumstances. In our example, God has, by S1, chosen to create Eve, but has not chosen between L and R. After acquiring the knowledge that leads to S2, God knows some important things about Eve's potential temptation by either a snake with apples or a snake with pears. The fact that p (the proposition that Adam will be taking an apple from Eve at t and eating it) is true rules out the other possibilities on which it is not true, leaving only two branches (thus helping God with his choice between L and R). Ruling those other branches out implies that, if God makes and prohibits apples (taking the right hand branch), then Eve will freely sin; and then, at the next node, will offer apples to Adam who will in turn freely choose to eat them. The fact that p is true implies something about which choices will be made if God chooses the left hand side, as well; she will be offering Adam apples at t in those circumstances, too, and he will freely accept them.

What kinds of conditionals are these, which God knows at S2, about what Eve and Adam will freely do if tempted in ways they will never be tempted? One possibility, of course, is just that they are CFs.¹⁶ But in that case, this instance of "peeking ahead" would not be an independent way — independent of Molinism — for God's foreknowledge to provide him with providentially useful information. Defenders of Simple Foreknowledge will not be satisfied with this answer.

Let's assume that God in fact will tell Eve not to eat pears, and that she resists the temptation to eat them. If Molinism is not true, and God does not offer Eve apples, then the following subjunctive conditional is not true: *Were* Eve offered apples, she *would* freely sin. So this conditional cannot be a part of what God knows, at S2. Nevertheless, God knows, at S2 — prior to God's knowing whether He will tempt her with apples or pears — that either Eve will not be tempted with apples, or she will sin by accepting

forbidden fruit. This is enough information to guide God's decision to choose L, forbidding pears and increasing the chances of Eve's doing the right thing. The material conditional "If *a*, then *b*" is equivalent to "Either not-*a*, or *b*". So this disjunctive information about Eve and apples implies at least the *material* conditional, "If Eve is tempted with apples, then she will sin". (That much is true, whether or not the material conditional is equivalent to the indicative conditionals of ordinary languages — a controversial question.) Could it be, not CFs, but rather material conditionals that God knows, and that allow him to use simple foreknowledge in the way envisaged?

Here is a quick and dirty argument against the idea that they are material conditionals:

God's knowledge that, if Eve is tempted with apples, she will sin, is supposed to be equivalent to "Either Eve is not tempted with apples, or she sins", a disjunction with (we are supposing) a true first disjunct and a false second disjunct. When a simple truth-functional disjunction is true, but one disjunct is false, the truth of the disjunction as a whole is dependent upon the truth of the other disjunct. Since Eve was tempted with pears and did not sin, the truth of the disjunction, and of the material conditional, is dependent upon the fact that Eve was not tempted with apples. So we have an improper circle of dependence: God decides to prohibit pears instead of apples because he knows the truth of the disjunction: either Eve is not tempted with apples, or she sins; and that disjunction is only true because God decides to prohibit apples.

One might wonder whether the same notion of *dependence* is invoked in the two claims: true disjunctions with a false disjunct *depend upon* the truth of the remaining

disjunct; and God's decision to prohibit pears *depends upon* knowing the disjunction.

But the more one thinks about the idea that God is relying upon mere material conditionals (and that similar subjunctive conditionals and counterfactuals are not also true and available to God at the same stage), the worse it seems.

Both material conditionals, "If Eve is tempted with apples, then she sins" and "If Eve is tempted with apples, then she resists temptation", are, by hypothesis, true. God's using the former, in these circumstances, puts him in a rather absurd situation. It is analogous to the following scenario. Suppose I am running late, and wondering whether I should even bother trying to drive to the airport in time to make my flight. Suppose also that, unbeknownst to me, there are neither subjunctive nor counterfactual truths about whether I would arrive at the airport on time. (Perhaps quantum indeterminacy leaves it radically undetermined whether I arrive early or late, no matter which route I take.) Now suppose I am told, by some trusted authority, that the following material conditional is true: If I try to drive to the airport, I will arrive too late to catch my plane. On the basis of this information, I decide to call the airline, tell them that I won't make the flight, and try to arrange for a later one. Would I feel cheated to learn that it was *not* true that, if I had tried to drive, I would have been late; and that the material conditional I was relying on — "If I try to drive, I will be late" — was true in virtue of the falsity of its antecedent? You bet I would! But God's reliance upon the material conditional about Eve and apples would mean that he was making decisions upon precisely this sort of basis.

Conclusions

God's "peeking ahead" of some of our free choices, to acquire information about events explanatorily downstream of those choices, leads either to the truth of some Molinistic CFs, or to absurdity. This result helps explain why Molinism is so important to both friends of foreknowledge and timeless knowledge. Without Molinism, foreknowledge and timeless knowledge still imply a risky view of providence; and that is the moral equivalent of (the dreaded) "Open Theism".

A providential use of foreknowledge that is not available to the Open Theist would involve God's knowing something about an event e that occurs at t , and using this knowledge in deciding to bring about an event e^* at an earlier time t^* — a time at which the goings-on at t are still "open". When Hunt gives examples of this sort, they typically build in the fact that e 's occurrence is unaffected by anything that happens at the place and time at which e^* occurs.¹⁷

¹ See Adams, "Time and Thisness" ... and Prior, "????", for the view that, before an individual exists, there is no individual essence or haecceity of that individual.

Plantinga's Molinistic conditionals are typically presented by him as descriptions of what persons with various haecceities would do (e.g., in *The Nature of Necessity* (????)); but in *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 19????), Plantinga made use of person types rather than haecceities.

² David Hunt's principle papers defending elements of Simple Foreknowledge are: "Omniprescient Agency", *Religious Studies* 28 (1992), pp. 351-369; "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge", *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993), pp. 396-416; "Dispositional Omniscience", *Philosophical Studies* 80 (1995), pp. 243-278; and "The

Simple Foreknowledge View”, in *God’s Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: Four Views*, ed. by J. Beilby and P. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 65-103. Hunt gives the expression “Simple Foreknowledge” a slightly less committal meaning than I have done (see “The Simple Foreknowledge View”, pp. 66-8).

³ E.g., Tomis Kapitan, “Providence, Foreknowledge, and Decision Procedures”, *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993), pp. 415-20; Michael D. Robinson, “Divine Providence, Simple Foreknowledge, and the ‘Metaphysical Principle’”, *Religious Studies* 40 (2004), pp. 471-83; and Robinson, “Divine Guidance and an Accidentally Necessary Future: a Response to Hunt”, *Religious Studies* 40 (2004), pp. 493-8.

⁴ E. g., William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 125-43; David Basinger, “Simple Foreknowledge and Providential Control”, *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993), pp. 421-7; and John Sanders, “Why Simple Foreknowledge Offers N More Providential Control than the Openness of God”, *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997), pp. 26-40.

⁵ Hunt, “Prescience and Providence: A Reply to My Critics”, *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993), pp. 430-440; “The Compatibility of Omniscience and Intentional Action: A Reply to Tomis Kapitan”, *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), pp. 49-60; “Providence, Foreknowledge, and Explanatory Loops: A Reply to Robinson”, *Religious Studies* 40 (2004), pp. 485-491; and “The Providential Advantage of Divine Foreknowledge”, in *Arguing About Religion*, ed. by Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 374-85.

⁶ FIND THIS IN HUNT

⁷ FIND IN HUNT

⁸ “Dispositional Omniscience”.

⁹ “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge”, p. 409.

¹⁰ “Dispositional Omniscience”, p. 269.

¹¹ (“Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge”, p. 409).

¹² One might think that the possibility of explanatory priority failing to hold, absolutely, between parts of God’s foreknowledge as a non-temporal kind of “divided consciousness”. Perhaps, within Christian philosophical theology, the notion might be of use in spelling out a “two minds” conception of the incarnation compatible with complete foreknowledge.

¹³ I have no objection to van Inwagen’s suggestion that God could issue disjunctive decrees, leaving it to impersonal nature to “decide” how things actually go; but this complication would simply add more junctures at which non-divine “choices” are made.

¹⁴ “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge”, p. 412.

¹⁵ FIND IN HUNT

¹⁶ The scenario provides information about what God will do, in certain non-actual

circumstances; but this information could be due to true CFs about God in a less

problematic way. Suppose the node right after Eve’s choice were, on both sides, a free

choice on God's part — a choice between three options: (i) to wipe out the human race at that point and start over with new creatures; (ii) to wipe Eve's memory clean, and let her try again; or (iii) to begin the laborious process of redemption. And suppose God's query about what Adam is doing at t produces an answer, p , that implies that the third alternative would be God's choice, on both left and right. So long as it was true at stage S1 that God had freely-chosen conditional intentions about all possible future decisions he might face, this would not be a problematic case of learning what he would freely choose before choosing to do it. His choices would not be made "for him" by the answer.

¹⁷ examples....