CRITICAL NOTICE

William Lane Craig. *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom.* Pp. xiii + 360. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991.) 160 fl.

In this book William Lane Craig gives a spirited defence of the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom. He begins by laying out standard arguments for logical fatalism and various responses. Craig argues that there is no sound argument for logical fatalism. Next, Craig argues that the arguments for theological fatalism 'are reducible to' the arguments for logical fatalism. Thus, Craig concludes that there is no sound argument for theological fatalism – the theological fatalist is guilty of various fallacies, confusions, and errors parallel to those of the logical fatalist. Further, Craig argues that various philosophers of science who have discussed such issues as backwards causation, time travel, precognition, and Newcomb's problem have been guilty of the sorts of confusions and errors made by the logical and theological fatalists. In making this argument, Craig discusses and develops many interesting connections between work in philosophy of science and work on free will.

The most salient merit of this work is its panoramic scope. Craig is familiar with and brings together a most remarkable amount of material from disparate fields. It is admirable that Craig has highlighted various interesting connections between discussions in philosophy of science and philosophy of religion (and metaphysics). I do not however believe that Craig's analysis of this literature is persuasive. In my view Craig frequently makes crucial analytical errors which vitiate his discussions and which render his project unsuccessful.[1]

The basic argument for theological fatalism employs a premise which expresses the 'fixity of the past'. It claims that temporally nonrelational or 'hard' features of the past are currently 'fixed'. Further, the argument claims that facts about God's past beliefs about a person's present activity involve precisely this sort of feature. In response, Craig denies that there is any plausibility to the fixity of the past premise. He goes on to argue that insofar

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[1] I do not have the space in this review exhaustively and carefully to examine Craig's arguments. I can only select a few points to discuss here. For a more thorough discussion, see my 'Soft Facts and Harsh Realities: A Reply to William Craig', *Religious Studies*, xxvii. [In the aforementioned paper, I discuss in detail various arguments which appeared in Craig's paper, '"Nice Soft Facts": Fischer on Foreknowledge'. *Religious Studies* xxv (1989), 235–46. My discussion is applicable to the book under discussion here insofar as the arguments are basically the same. Craig also presents these arguments (in brief form) in his book, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1987). To the extent that Craig's arguments in these different places are fundamentally the same, the same critical analysis applies.]

as facts about the past can counterfactually depend on facts about the present or future, these past facts need *not* be considered currently fixed. Perhaps the most important recurrent theme in Craig's book is the claim that a certain kind of counterfactual (or conditional) dependence of the past on the present or future entails the lack of fixity of the past: that is to say, the truth of certain appropriate backtracking conditionals is a sufficient condition for certain paired claims about individuals' freedom.

Craig contends that the fixity of the past constraint, understood to apply to all nonrelational features of the past, seems to imply theological fatalism, and he concludes that it thus begs the question. This is remarkable – especially in the context of other claims Craig makes about the structure of the dialectic pertaining to theological fatalism. If the fixity of the past constraint is motivated by independent considerations, the mere fact that it threatens to imply theological fatalism cannot imply that it is question-begging to invoke it (unless all deductive arguments for any thesis are taken to be question-begging!)[2]

Now I wish to focus on Craig's claim about counterfactual dependence. Evidently, Craig thinks that the compatibilist position is obviously true *simply* in virtue of the truth of the relevant backtracking conditionals. But it clearly does not follow from the mere fact that the relevant backtracking conditionals are true that *one has it in one's power to perform the relevant actions*. More specifically, what is at issue is *both* a conditional and a 'can-claim' (a claim about what one has it in one's power to do); indeed, what is at issue is the *relationship* between such backtracking conditionals and the paired can-claims.

Let us look at this issue more carefully. Suppose Mary stands up at T_2. Then (on certain assumptions) God believed at T_1 that Mary would stand at T_2. A compatibilist (of the sort under consideration here) is committed to the following two claims (given that these are 'ordinary' circumstances):

(I)   Mary can at T_2 (or slightly before) refrain from standing up, and

(II) If Mary were to refrain from standing at T_2, then God would have believed at T_1 that Mary would refrain from standing at T_2.

Call (I) the 'can-claim' and (II) the 'backtracking conditional'. Surely, it

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[2] Later in his book, Craig points out that God can be taken to be the Predictor in Newcomb's Problem. On such a view, God is simply assumed to have foreknowledge of an individual's choice, although the individual is by hypothesis taken to be free not to make the choice in question. But this supposition would appear to be egregiously question-begging, within the context of an assessment of theological fatalism. So Craig is committed to a most bizarre pattern of judgments about the problematic of the debates about theological fatalism: it is question-begging to apply an (allegedly) independently motivated fixity of the past constraint, but it is not question-begging to assume in Newcomb's Problem that God is the Predictor and thus that God has foreknowledge of a free choice. Evidently, Craig's standards for begging the question are rather variable and selective!

is not enough to establish compatibilism to point to the (putative) truth of
(II); what must be investigated is the *relationship* between (I) and (II). And
it is at least plausible to suppose (as the incompatibilist does) that the truth
of (II) rules out the truth of (I). Insofar as (II) states that it is a necessary
condition of Mary's refraining from standing that some temporally genuine
(hard) feature of the past would have been different from the way it actually
was, it is at least plausible to suppose that (II)'s truth rules out the truth of
(I). The issue, then, is not simply whether a conditional such as (II) is true;
it is necessary to ask about the relationship between such conditionals and
the relevant can-claims.

Craig seems to be arguing that since the relevant backtracking condi-
tionals are true, it is obvious that we have power over the past. But consider
the following analogous reasoning. Suppose I am chained to my desk by very
strong chains (which, intuitively, I cannot break). The following conditional
may well be true (given the right specification of detail): if I were to leave
my office, then I would not have been chained to my desk. But it certainly
does not follow from the truth of this conditional that I *can* leave my office,
or that I have power over the past (or the chains). In general, if it is a
necessary condition of my performing a certain action A that I do something
which intuitively I cannot do, then I cannot do A. And so it is at least
plausible to suppose that if it is a necessary condition of my doing something
that I so act that some temporally genuine feature of the past would have
been different from what it actually was, then I cannot do the thing in
question.[3]

Here we see the importance of Craig's denial of the force of the fixity of
the past idea – the idea that temporally nonrelational features of the past are
currently fixed. This idea would imply that so acting that such temporally
nonrelational features of the past would not have been facts is analogous to

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[3] In the context of a discussion of an argument (presented by Carl Ginet) for the incompatibility of
causal determinism and human freedom, D. Goldstick makes precisely the same move as does Craig, and
it can be seen to be problematic in a similar way. (D. Goldstick, 'Why We Might Still Have A Choice',
Australasian Journal of Philosophy, LVII (1979), 305–8. Goldstick asks us to imagine a case in which some
deed D issues from condition C (which obtained prior to the relevant individual's birth) via the mediation
of a predominant wish W to perform D). Goldstick points out that it may be true that (1) If W hadn't
occurred, then D wouldn't have occurred. And he concludes that the individual has a choice about the
occurrence of D; the critical assumption here is that (1) is *sufficient* for the claim that the individual has
a choice about the occurrence of D.

But suppose now that an individual actually performs a deed D as a result of a predominant wish W
to perform D. But the wish here was induced by a demonic scientist who directly controls the individual's
brain process (through a sophisticated computer of some sort). Indeed, the scientist controls all of the
individual's behaviour through direct manipulation of the brain; this control is based upon the scientist's
desires and projects (and *not* the individual's), and the scientist's instruments are completely foolproof.
Now the scientist's actually exerting this sort of control is consistent with its being the case that if W
hadn't occurred, the scientist wouldn't have exerted control. Perhaps if W hadn't occurred, a desire W'
for E would have occurred and E would have ensued. But the truth of this conditional does not alter the
fact that the scientist actually controlled the individual's behaviour and that the individual has no
power to do otherwise. Thus, it can be seen that (1) is not sufficient for the pertinent can-claim, namely
the claim that the individual has a choice about the occurrence of D. Goldstick's error is parallel to
Craig's, and they can be exposed in parallel ways.

so acting that the chains would not have bound me – there are 'obstacles' to doing either sort of thing. If the fixity of the past idea has no merit, then the objections to the sufficiency of the backtrackers for the can-claims have less weight. But if (as I have suggested) there is intuitive plausibility to the fixity of the past premise, then Craig's claims about the sufficiency of the backtracking conditionals for the relevant can-claims are problematic.

Craig says:

> Some writers ... believe that the problem entailed by permitting tachyonic backward causation is fatalism. ... The objection seems to be that one could, for example, call oneself in the past on a tachyonic antitelephone and then, after receiving the call, decide not to place it after all. By now, however, the answer to this objection has become clear: the fact that one has received a call from oneself entails not that one is not free to refrain from placing the call, but only that he will not in fact refrain from placing it. (126–7)

But here the circumstances posited (including the fact that the agent has indeed received the call) entail not *only* that the agent does not refrain from making the call, but *also* that if he were to refrain from making it, then the past would have been other than it actually was (in the sense that temporally nonrelational or hard features of the past would have been different from the way they actually were). And under such circumstances it is at least plausible to suppose that the agent *cannot* refrain from placing the call (insofar as the past is fixed). Further, this point need not entail any sort of troubling global fatalism. The only way in which some sort of global fatalism would ensue would be if the tachyonic antitelephones were *used* systematically and comprehensively; but in such a world, it is not clear what would remain of such notions as freedom in any case. (Note that the mere *possible* use of such telephones would not entail fatalism.)

Craig points out that Gödel was disturbed at the possibility that someone might travel into the past and find a person who would be himself at some earlier period of his life and that he might be able to do something to this person which he does not remember having happened. Craig says:

> This objection, however, is once again infected by fallacious reasoning of fatalism. ... from the fact that someone did not do something, it does not follow that he could not have done it. Hence, Gödel was unnecessarily concerned about my doing something to myself which I could not remember: all that follows from his objection is either that I did not perform the action or that I forgot it.[4]

Consider Craig's claim, 'from the fact that someone did not do something, it does not follow that he could not have done it'. I take it that this is uncontroversial. But sometimes the very circumstances that allow us to know that an agent did not do something *also* entail that his doing it would require the past to be different from what it actually was (in the sense that some temporally nonrelational features of the past would be different from

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[4] Craig, 143.

the way they actually were.) In such circumstances, it is at least plausible to suppose that the agent could not have done the action in question. Note that this supposition is *not* alleged to follow from the mere fact that the agent did not do the act. (In Craig's discussion of Newcomb's Problem, he says, 'Given that God foreknows what I shall choose, it only follows that I shall not choose otherwise, not that I can not.' But again, the same analysis applies.)

Craig says:

> Earman asks us to consider a rocket ship that at some space-time point x can fire a probe that will travel along a timelike loop into the past lobe of x's light cone. Suppose the rocket is programmed to fire the probe unless a safety switch is on and that the safety switch is turned on if and only if the 'return' of the probe is detected by a sensing device with which the rocket is equipped. Is the probe fired or not? The answer is that it is fired if and only if it is not fired, which is logically absurd. (143)

Craig points out that Earman holds that since the devices seem to be possible, it follows that closed timelike loops do not actually exist. Craig however, takes issue with Earman's reasoning:

> The opponent of time travel has thus committed precisely the same fallacy as the fatalist, and the response to them has the same form. The opponent of fatalism asserts that from either the antecedent truth of or God's foreknowledge of a future contingent proposition it follows, not that the future event cannot occur but only that it *will* not occur; the proponent of time travel maintains that from the fact that timelike loops exist it follows, not that such rockets *cannot* exist or function property, but only that they *do* not exist or function properly. Further, the opponent of fatalism maintains that if the contingent event were not to occur, then different propositions *would* have been true and God's foreknowledge *would* have been otherwise; the proponent of time travel contends that if such rockets *were* to be built and function properly then the timelike loops *would* not exist. Thus, the two situations seem quite parallel. (144)

Exactly the same problem plagues Craig's discussion here as was diagnosed above: the mere fact that a certain backtracking conditional is true does not suffice for the truth of the pertinent can-claim. Indeed, it is at least reasonable to suppose that the truth of such a conditional *rules out* the truth of a can-claim, insofar as the conditional asserts that it is a necessary condition of doing the act in question that a genuine, nonrelational feature of the past would have been different from what it actually was. So, given that there actually are time-like loops and given the truth of the backtracking conditional (which Craig alleges is true here) that if the machines were built and functioned properly, there would have been no time-like loops, it follows that it is reasonable to assert that such properly functioning machines *cannot* be built. If it is a necessary condition of building these machines that some genuine feature of the past not have obtained, then there is some reason to suppose that the machines cannot be built. As far as I can see, the only way in which such examples can support compatibilism is if it is supposed that the

issue of the truth of the relevant backtracking conditionals is the *only* relevant issue and thus that such conditionals pose absolutely no problem for the paired can-claims. But this supposition has been called into question.

A final point. As argued above, the principle of the fixity of the past must be interpreted so as to apply to temporally nonrelational features of the past. Now consider the backtracking conditional, 'If the machines (described above) were to be built and functioned properly, then there would have been no timelike loops.' The fact whose nonoccurrence is entailed by the consequent of the backtracker is: 'Timelike loops existed.' Is it evident that this is a hard fact about the past? It might be argued that it is *not*. After all, hard facts about the past must be *genuinely* and *solely* about the past. Some facts about the past fail to be hard because they are genuinely but not solely about the past: for example, the conjunctive fact that Jack sat yesterday and yesterday it was true that the sun would rise tomorrow is genuinely but not solely about the past. Other facts about the past fail to be hard because they are not even genuinely about the past. Among these, some are (allegedly) about some other temporal realm: for example, the fact that God timelessly believes that Jack sits on Monday. This atemporal fact about God is not genuinely about the past because it is about some other temporal realm.

But perhaps there is another way of failing to be a hard fact in virtue of failing to be genuinely about the past (in the relevant sense). It may be that a fact could fail to be genuinely about the past in virtue of being about the *very structure* of time; such a fact would not posit that anything happen at a particular time, but specify the framework within which such statements could be made. And it is reasonable to think that a fact such as 'Timelike loops existed' is just such a fact. If so, it would be highly controversial whether the two arguments – about divine foreknowledge and about time travel – are parallel at a deep level, since it is at least reasonable to suppose that a fact such as that God held a certain belief at a certain time is a hard fact (or at least that it has a temporally nonrelational (hard) aspect). The fact about God's belief posits that an individual (God) had a certain property or was in a certain state at a time, whereas the fact about the timelike loops is about the very structure of time.

There is, then, a dilemma for Craig. Either the fact about timelike loops is hard or not.[5] If it is, then the parallel between the case of foreknowledge and time travel is preserved, but it becomes pressing to consider the *relationship* between the backtracking conditional and the relevant can-claim. Further, it emerges that it is highly contentious whether it is fallacious to conclude that, given the truth of the backtracker, the pertinent can-claim is false. But if the fact is not a hard fact, then the parallel between the case of foreknowledge and time travel is attenuated.

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[5] By 'hard' here I mean to include soft facts with hard aspects or parts, i.e. hard-type soft facts.