Omniprescience and Tough Choices

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Let’s say that you are omnipresent iff you always believe—occurrently and with maximal confidence—all and only truths, including ones about the future. Several philosophers have argued that an omnipresent person couldn’t act in certain ways.¹ In this paper, I’ll present and assess the most promising such argument I know of: the Tough Choices Argument (TCA). The TCA concludes that an omnipresent person couldn’t make a tough choice—i.e., a choice between alternative (mutually excluding) courses of action in light of knowledge that none is uniquely reasonable.² The TCA derives from an argument due to Tomis Kapitan;³ and my favored objection to the TCA superficially resembles a reply to Kapitan’s argument due to David Hunt.⁴ Along the way, then, I’ll discuss Kapitan’s argument, and Hunt’s reply, to show how they differ from the TCA and my favored objection to it.

To motivate my presentation and assessment of the TCA, I’ll start by arguing that many traditional theists are committed to thinking that God is an omnipresent person who makes tough choices—and so, are committed to denying the TCA’s conclusion. Most traditional theists think God is free

¹ La Croix (1976) and Quinn (1978) are early, influential contributions to contemporary work on such issues.
² What we’ll call “tough choices” result from what Peter van Inwagen (2004: 217) has labeled “serious deliberation” and what Eddy Nahmias (2006: 631) has dubbed “close calls.” Writes van Inwagen: “[S]erious deliberation...[occurs when] one is choosing between alternatives and it does not seem to one (once all the purely factual questions have been settled) that the reasons that favor either alternative are clearly the stronger.” And writes Nahmias: “Let us call these moments of (in)decision, which leave the agent...with nearly equally compelling alternatives for choice, ‘close calls.’”
with respect to which feasible world is the actual world. Now, if there's a single best feasible world, then God isn't free with respect to which feasible world is the actual world (more on this—call it **Questionable Step 1 [QS1]**—below). So, most traditional theists should deny that there's a single best creatable world. But if there's not a single best creatable world, then God makes some tough choices (more on this—call it **Questionable Step 2 [QS2]**—below). So, most traditional theists should think that God makes some tough choices. Further, most theists who should think God makes some tough choices will also think God is omnipresent. But the TCA threatens to rule out the possibility of an omnipresent person who makes tough choices. The TCA thus poses a serious threat to traditional theism. Accordingly, it deserves the attention of anyone interested in the viability of such theism.

I flagged two questionable steps in the above argument: QS1 and QS2. There are strong arguments available for each of these claims. Let's start with QS1. Suppose there's a single best feasible world, BW. BW’s status as best feasible world is presumably determined by which worlds are feasible and their associated overall values (which perhaps supervene on other facts about the worlds). Plausibly, God isn't free with respect to which worlds are feasible or the associated overall values of those worlds. So BW’s status as best feasible world is entailed by facts relative to which God isn't free. But one lacks freedom relative to logical consequences of facts relative to which one lacks freedom. So, God isn't free with respect to the fact that BW is the best creatable world. Finally, it’s plausible that God must actualize the best creatable world provided there is such a thing. So, God’s actualizing BW is entailed by facts relative to which he lacks freedom. But then, by the above closure principle, God isn't free with respect to which feasible world becomes the actual world. By conditional proof, we now have QS1.

Now for QS2. Suppose there’s not a single best creatable world. Then either there’s an infinite hierarchy of better and better feasible worlds or there’s a tie for best feasible world or there are incommensurable feasible worlds. Suppose one of these options holds. Then each creatable world is presumably such that

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5 Following Plantinga (1974), say that a possible world W is feasible iff God has it within his power to “actualize” (make actual) W. For variety, I’ll use “feasible” and “creatable” interchangeably.
6 For helpful discussion and defense of this and other similar closure principles for “relative unfreedom,” see (e.g.) Finch and Warfield (1998) and Carlson (2000).
8 For similar argumentation, see Rowe (2004).
God knows his reasons do not conclusively favor actualizing it.\textsuperscript{10} So, when God chooses which feasible world to actualize, he knows that none of the considered options is uniquely reasonable. When God chooses which creatable world to actualize, he makes (what we’re calling) a tough choice: God chooses between alternative courses of action in light of knowledge that none is uniquely reasonable. By conditional proof, we now have QS2.

I think the last couple of paragraphs suffice to justify QS1 and QS2, the two questionable steps of my argument that the TCA poses a serious threat to traditional theism. I hope that that argument convinces you (if you weren’t convinced already) that the TCA deserves serious attention, thus motivating my presentation and assessment of it.

Without further ado, here is the Tough Choices Argument:

1. Suppose S is omniprescient (Assumption for Conditional Proof).
2. If a person makes a tough choice between alternative courses of action A and B, then (prior to the choice) the person believes about each of A and B that her taking it is epistemically possible—i.e., she believes about each of A and B that she may take it (where “may” here expresses an epistemic, as opposed to a metaphysical, modality).\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Objection:} Suppose it’s a brute contingent fact that God prefers a certain combination of values, V, to all other value combinations for possible worlds. Suppose further that among the incommensurable feasible worlds (or the worlds tied for best feasible world, or the infinite hierarchy of better and better feasible worlds) there’s exactly one that instantiates V. Then it may be there’s a creatable world such that God knows his reasons conclusively favor actualizing it. But this means the claim to which this note is appended doesn’t follow from the reason given for it (viz., that one of the three indicated options holds).

\textbf{Reply:} First, assuming that God must do anything his reasons conclusively favor, the objector’s supposition implies (via the closure principle for “relative unfreedom”) that God could be unfree with respect to which feasible world is actual. Since I think (with most traditional theists, so far as I can tell) God must be free with respect to which creatable world is actual, I deny that the objector’s supposition is possible. But second (and more importantly), the overall argument in which QS2 figures still prevails (with slight modification) even if the objector’s supposition is possible. Recall the argument’s target conclusion: Most traditional theists should think that God makes some tough choices. If the objector’s supposition is possible, what follows from the claim that one of the three relevant options holds is this: either each creatable world is such that God knows his reasons don’t conclusively favor actualizing it or God isn’t free with respect to which creatable world is actual. Since most traditional theists think God is free with respect to which feasible world is actual, most of them should conclude that each creatable world is such that God knows his reasons don’t conclusively favor actualizing it—and so, that when God chooses which feasible world to actualize, he makes (what we’re calling) a tough choice. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising the objection considered in this note.)

\textsuperscript{11} Notably, (2) could—without substantive change to the TCA—be weakened so that it requires only that a maker of tough choices be disposed to believe about each of her considered courses of action that she may take it.
3. If S believes about each of A and B that she may take it, then S lacks a maximally firm occurrent belief as to whether she will take A. [1]

4. So: If S makes a tough choice between A and B, then (prior to the choice) S lacks a maximally firm occurrent belief as to whether she will take A. [2,3]

5. But: S has a maximally firm occurrent belief as to whether she will take A. [1]

6. So: S does not make a tough choice between A and B. [4,5]

C. So: If S is omniprescient, then S does not make a tough choice between A and B. [1–6]

(C) generalizes to the thesis that an omniprescient person can’t make a tough choice. So, if the TCA is sound, being omniprescient excludes making tough choices.

Given the definition of “omniprescience” in play here, (1) clearly implies (5); and my later critical assessment of the TCA will focus on (2) and some of the main considerations in its favor. One good way to clarify the argument at this point is to show how (3) follows from (1). After doing that, I’ll briefly discuss an argument from Tomis Kapitan that inspires the TCA, and an important reply to Kapitan’s argument from David Hunt. This discussion will make clear how the TCA, and my favored objection to it, differ from Kapitan’s argument and Hunt’s reply. We’ll then be ready to consider my objection to the TCA in detail.

How, exactly, is (3) supposed to follow from (1)? Well, assume (1) is true, and that S has a maximally firm occurrent belief as to whether she’ll take course of action A (as opposed to B). Either S believes that she’ll take A, or S believes that she’ll take B. Suppose S believes she’ll take A. Then S has a maximally firm occurrent belief that she’ll take A, and (by 1) simultaneously lacks the belief that she’ll take B. If S were now to (assertively) utter “I may take course of action B,” her assertion would be false: under these conditions, it’s not epistemically possible for S that she’ll take B. So, given that S has a maximally firm occurrent belief that she’ll take A and simultaneously lacks the belief that she’ll take B, it follows (by 1) that S doesn’t regard her pursuing B as epistemically possible. Parallel reasoning shows that if S instead believes that she’ll take course of action B, then S doesn’t regard her pursuing A as epistemically possible. So, if S has a maximally firm occurrent belief as to whether she will pursue course of action A (as opposed to B), then S doesn’t believe about each of A and B that she may pursue it. Contrapose that last claim and you have (3). So (1) does imply (3) after all.

I’ll now explain how the TCA differs from the argument due to Kapitan that inspires it, and how an important reply to Kapitan’s argument due to Hunt...
differs from my favored objection to the TCA. The main difference between the TCA and Kapitan’s similar argument is that the latter (unlike the former) concerns not making a tough choice but instead simply gaining an intention. More fully, Kapitan employs the following premise that is somewhat similar to—but, as we’ll soon see, much less plausible than—premise (2) of the TCA:

Kapitan’s Premise (KP): If a person acquires an intention to (take course of action) A, then (prior to gaining the intention) the person believes both that she may A and that she may not A—i.e., prior to gaining the intention, she believes about each of A and not-A that it is epistemically possible.  

There are several counter-examples to KP that do not also impugn premise (2) of the TCA. To begin to see this, consider the following three cases of intention acquisition described by Alfred Mele:

1. The Front Door: As a part of my normal routine, I unlock my front door. Further, I unlock the door intentionally, gaining an intention to now unlock the door just before unlocking it.
2. The Beer Desire: Walking home from work, Helen notices her favorite brand of beer on display in a store window. The sight of the beer prompts a desire to buy some, and her acquiring that desire issues straightaway in an intention to buy some.
3. The Experienced Driver: [Sometimes] . . . a perceptual event, given the agent’s psychological profile, straightaway prompts an intention to A. Seeing a dog dart into the path of his car, an experienced driver who is attending to traffic conditions may immediately acquire an intention to swerve.

Mele contends that in these cases:

there is no uncertainty that intention acquisition resolves. I was not uncertain about whether to unlock my door, Helen was not uncertain about whether to buy the beer, and the driver was not uncertain about what course of action to take. At no time were any of us uncertain about the matters at issue.  

On the basis of such examples, Mele concludes that it’s possible for you to gain an intention to A without prior uncertainty as to whether you’ll A.

Such examples justify a stronger conclusion. We could fill in the above cases so that—prior to gaining the relevant intentions—Mele was (psychologically) certain he’d unlock his door, Helen was certain she’d buy the beer,

and the driver was certain he'd swerve to miss the dog. Further, we can add that the subjects did not also believe that they wouldn't perform those acts. So amplified, the cases cast serious doubt on KP: each involves a person who gained an intention to A yet did not previously regard failure to A as epistemically possible. But since the people in such cases aren't making tough choices (i.e., choosing between incompatible courses of action in light of knowledge that none is uniquely reasonable), the cases do not also impugn premise (2) of the TCA.

For a final kind of counter-example to KP, consider the following case due to Dana Nelkin (my emphasis):

**Distraught Friend:** [Y]ou are engaged in a long-anticipated activity (e.g., watching an overtime period of a championship basketball game, attending a concert, taking a once-in-a-lifetime trek). You receive a call from a friend who desperately needs to talk to someone about the sudden and unexpected death of a family member. In the past, you have always [decided] in favor of talking to your friend; indeed, this is the kind of person you are. Based on these considerations, and perhaps others, you know you will decide the same way today. However, you haven't...[gained an intention] to do so yet. But you can and do.15

We can understand Distraught Friend so that your knowledge that you'll talk to your friend (which you have *before* gaining an intention to do) derives in part from your knowledge that your reasons conclusively favor talking to your friend. So understood, Distraught Friend is a counter-example to KP that does not also threaten premise (2) of the TCA. Provided you know that your reasons conclusively favor talking to your friend, then (by definition) your choice to talk to your friend is not a “tough choice.” And we can safely suppose that, prior to your choosing to talk to your friend, you did not regard failure to talk to your friend as epistemically possible. (If you had said—while knowing, perhaps with maximal confidence, that you were about to choose to talk to your friend—“I may just skip out on my friend this time,” you'd have said something false.)

(The above counter-examples to KP imply that your knowing, or being maximally confident, that you'll perform action A is compatible with your lacking an intention to A. Some philosophers have claimed that these are incompatible. Writes Carl Ginet: “[I]t is conceptually impossible for a person to know what a decision of his is going to be before he makes it.”16 [cf. Hampshire and Hart (1958).] The standard and, I believe, decisive reply to this claim is that it confuses propositional attitudes that

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16 Ginet (1962: 50–1).
are clearly logically independent: *knowledge*, or *psychological certainty*, and *intention.*)

Let’s sum up the last few paragraphs. The main difference between the TCA and Kapitan’s similar argument is this: the latter employs KP, whereas the former employs an analogous claim—premise (2)—that concerns not *simply gaining an intention* but instead *making a tough choice.* There are numerous counter-examples to KP that do not also threaten (2). So, what’s arguably the TCA’s weakest link is considerably stronger than what’s arguably the weakest link of Kapitan’s argument. This is a clear way in which the TCA improves upon the argument that inspires it.

My favored reply to the Tough Choices Argument will be that it fails because it depends on the alleged incompatibility of omniprescience and freedom. More on precisely how the TCA depends on the indicated incompatibility thesis, and why such dependence spells doom for the TCA, in a moment. What I need to do now is to distinguish my favored objection to the TCA from an important reply to Kapitan’s similar argument due to David Hunt.

In Hunt’s terminology, arguments like the TCA and Kapitan’s argument are formulations of the “Problem of Agency”; and arguments for the conclusion that an omniprescient being would rule out free agency are formulations of what Hunt calls the “Problem of Freedom.” He argues that the Problems of Agency and Freedom “are really one, and the resolution of this joint problem depends on current investigations of the Problem of Freedom rather than the Problem of Agency.” As will become clear, I agree with Hunt’s conclusion that the “Problem of Agency is parasitic on the Problem of Freedom.” But I reject his argument for our shared conclusion:

The Problem of Agency presupposes the presumptive agent’s acceptance of a fatalistic argument; but only the argument for Theological Fatalism stands any chance of being sound; therefore the Problem of Agency is ineliminable for a rational agent only if the argument for Theological Fatalism is sound. Since the latter argument sets forth the Problem of Freedom, the Problem of Agency (in its only interesting form) is dependent on the Problem of Freedom.  

The main reason Hunt offers for believing our shared conclusion is this: any argument that counts as an interesting version of the Problem of Agency will ascribe to the omniprescient agent in question a belief in some or other argument for the thesis that an omniprescient being rules out the existence of free agents.

So far as I can see, though, neither the TCA itself nor the argument that results from replacing (2) with KP (Kapitan’s argument) ascribes to the omnipresent agent in question (S) belief in some or other argument for the incompatibility of omniprescience and freedom. Indeed, we seem to have formulated and discussed both the TCA and Kapitan’s argument without also laying out an argument that an omnipresent being rules out the existence of any free agents. Further, both the TCA and Kapitan’s argument count as interesting versions of (what Hunt calls) the Problem of Agency. Thus, Hunt hasn’t provided good reason to accept our common conclusion: we can formulate interesting versions of the Problem of Agency without also presenting and endorsing a version of the Problem of Freedom.

We’re now ready to consider my favored objection to the TCA, which focuses on:

2. If a person makes a tough choice between alternative courses of action A and B, then (prior to the choice) the person believes about each of A and B that her taking it is epistemically possible.

After presenting my objection to the TCA, I’ll justify its two questionable steps.

The best case for (2) doesn’t favor (2) over the following somewhat different requirement on making a tough choice:

Belief in Freedom Requirement (BFR): If a person makes a tough choice between alternative courses of action A and B, then the person believes about each of A and B that she’s (metaphysically) free to take it (alternatively, that she has it within her power to pursue it).  

In light of the (initially questionable—so see below) point that the strongest case for (2) is at best neutral between (2) and BFR, the TCA’s proponent must replace (2) with the weaker:

2*. If a person makes a tough choice between alternative courses of action A and B, then either the person believes about each of A and B that her taking it is epistemically possible or she believes about each of A and B that she’s (metaphysically) free to take it.

18 For articulation, argument for, and defense of something like BFR, see van Inwagen (1983, 1998, 2004) and Coffman and Warfield (2005). Notably, BFR could—without substantive change to my objection to the TCA—be weakened so that it requires only that a maker of tough choices be disposed to believe about each of her considered courses of action that she’s (metaphysically) free to take it.
Once (2) has been replaced with (2*), the TCA’s proponent must (on pain of offering an invalid argument) replace (3) with:

3*. If (omniprescient) S either believes about each of A and B that her taking it is epistemically possible or believes about each of A and B that she’s free to take it, then S lacks a maximally firm occurrent belief as to whether she’ll take A.

Now, 3* has the following:

*Obvious Consequence (OC): If (omniprescient) S believes about each of A and B that she’s free to take it, then S neither believes that she’ll take A nor believes that she’ll take B.

And, finally, OC entails that the existence of an omniprescient being rules out the existence of free agents (a second questionable step—see below).

In sum: the TCA is tenable only if it employs a premise—viz. (3*)—that entails the incompatibility of omniprescience and freedom. So the TCA depends dialectically on the incompatibility of omniprescience and freedom. But then the TCA fails for at least one—for what it’s worth, I’d say all—of the following three reasons.

First, since omniprescience is compatible with freedom, the TCA depends dialectically on a false proposition. Second, since (as the relevant debate presently stands) it’s at least as likely as not that omniprescience is compatible with freedom, the TCA depends dialectically on a highly questionable thesis. Third, since (in any case) the TCA clearly does depend dialectically on the incompatibility of omniprescience and freedom, the argument falls short of a key part of its billing—viz., that it’s a special, independent problem for (the relevant kind of) theistic belief, a serious challenge to such belief regardless of whether omniprescience excludes free agency.

What remains is to justify the two questionable steps in my objection. We’ll take them in reverse order. First, why think OC entails that omniprescience is incompatible with the existence of free agents? Well, suppose that the existence of an omniprescient person (S) is compatible with the existence of free agents. Presumably, if freedom and omniprescience are compatible, then it’s also possible that there be an omniprescient person who is also free. Notice that the TCA provides no reason at all to deny this plausible conditional unless the TCA is supplemented with the claim that acting freely

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19. For compelling defenses of the compatibility of omniprescience and freedom, see Warfield (1997) and Merricks (2009).

requires making tough choices. But that last claim is refuted by cases involving a free act whose agent knows her reasons conclusively favor some or other of her considered acts—a suitably modified version of Distraught Friend (see above) would fit this bill, as would certain examples involving “weakness of will.”\(^2^1\) And if it’s possible that there be a free omniprescient person, then \(OC\) is false: it’s possible that omniprescient \(S\) correctly believes about each of \(A\) and \(B\) that she’s free to take it, yet also correctly believes about one of \(A\) and \(B\) that she will take it. So, by conditional proof, if omniprescience is compatible with freedom, then \(OC\) is false. Contrapose that last claim and we have the second of the two (initially) questionable steps of my objection to the TCA: \(OC\) entails that omniprescience excludes freedom.

Now for that first questionable step. Why think the strongest case for premise (2) of the TCA is at best neutral between (2) and BFR? In my judgment, the following three data jointly constitute the best available prima facie case for (2):\(^2^2\)

1. **Datum 1 (D1):** If you make a tough choice between alternative courses of action \(A\) and \(B\), then (prior to the choice) you believe that it is (in some sense) possible for you to take either of \(A\) and \(B\).\(^2^3\)
2. **Datum 2 (D2):** If a person who’s trying to make a tough choice is asked whether he’s aware of factors that threaten the freedom of the upcoming choice, the following would be a natural reply: “No, I’m not aware of any such factors. So far as I can tell, the outcome is up to me.”\(^2^4\)
3. **Datum 3 (D3):** A Determinist (i.e., someone who believes in Determinism—the remote past and physical laws together fix a unique future) could make a tough choice without thereby holding explicitly inconsistent beliefs.\(^2^5\)

\(^2^1\) One could also challenge the indicated conditional with the claim that knowing you’ll perform \(A\) entails intending to \(A\). Combining this claim with the thesis that you’re free only if you sometimes gain intentions would lend support to the claim that there can’t be a free omniprescient person. But (as we saw above) knowing you’ll perform \(A\) does not entail that you already intend to \(A\).

\(^2^2\) I invite readers to amplify this prima facie case for (2) as they see fit in order to determine whether a suitably modified version of the following argument succeeds.

\(^2^3\) For helpful discussion of D1 that cites both historical and contemporary proponents of such claims, see van Inwagen (1983), Kapitan (1986), and Nelkin (2004).


\(^2^5\) For endorsement of such claims, see Waller (1985), Kapitan (1986), Pettit (1989), Nelkin (2004), and Pereboom (2008).
Because my objection to the TCA doesn’t require the claim that BFR explains D1–D3 better than (2) does, I’ll just grant that (2) provides a good explanation of D1–D3. What I need to argue is that BFR can explain D1–D3 at least as well as (2) does. Clearly, each requirement straightforwardly implies D1. So our question becomes this: can BFR provide a good explanation of D2 and D3?

Admittedly, there’s prima facie tension between D2 and BFR. On BFR, someone who makes a tough choice believes (prior to the choice) that she is free (has it within her power) to take any of her considered courses of action. Initially, then, it looks as though BFR’s advocate should predict that someone who’s trying to make a tough choice will unqualifiedly self-ascribe freedom relative to the upcoming choice when asked whether she’s aware of any “freedom-threatening” factors. But that initial appearance is misleading: BFR’s proponent can make perfect sense of such a person’s passing up an unqualified self-ascription of freedom for something weaker in circumstances of the relevant sort. Here are two good “BFR-friendly” explanations of D2.

On the one hand, the question whether you’re aware of “freedom-threatening” factors may distract you away from the deliberative task at hand, resulting in a temporary suspension of your deliberation. Provided this happens, you’re no longer in the process of trying to make a tough choice when fielding the indicated question. But if you’ve stopped deliberating to answer the question, then—consistent with BFR—you may no longer believe you’re free to do multiple different things. And your no longer holding that belief would explain why you pass up an unqualified self-ascription of freedom for something weaker in circumstances of the relevant sort. Here are two good “BFR-friendly” explanations of D2.

On the other hand, you might believe throughout the entire episode that you are free to do each of multiple different acts. However, you might naturally take the question “Are you aware of any ‘freedom-threatening’ factors?” as a bit of evidence that such factors are present, and so as a bit of evidence that you’re not free to do multiple different things. Under such circumstances, you might naturally hesitate to make an unqualified self-ascription of freedom for a qualified one (e.g., “So far as I know, I’m free with respect to the outcome . . .”).

Consider an analogy. You go to see the doctor, justifiedly confident that you’re getting enough exercise. Upon seeing you, the doctor immediately asks: “Are you getting enough exercise?” It would be natural for you to regard the question itself as a bit of evidence that you’re not getting enough
exercise, though not enough evidence to require you to immediately drop your belief that you are getting enough exercise. So, while you remain confident (for the moment anyway) that you are getting enough exercise, you take yourself to have been offered a bit of evidence that you’re not. In such a situation, it would be natural (and perhaps even conversationally required) to bypass an unqualified “Yes” for something weaker—e.g., “So far as I know, I’m exercising enough…” or “I think I’m exercising enough…”.

Similarly, it would be natural for a person who is asked, while trying to make a tough choice, whether she’s aware of any “freedom-threatening” factors, to bypass an unqualified self-ascription of freedom for something weaker—even if she remains justifiedly confident throughout that she’s free with respect to the outcome of her deliberation.

In light of the last couple of paragraphs, I conclude that BFR’s proponent can deliver a plausible explanation of D2. So, if D1–D3 really do do favor premise (2) of the TCA over BFR, that must be because BFR can’t honor D3.

But proponents of BFR can accommodate D3. BFR entails that you make a tough choice only if (prior to the choice) you believe you’re free to perform multiple different acts. Now, every party to the debate over compatibilism (about metaphysical freedom and determinism) will—or at least should—agree that compatibilism is not obviously false.26 (Indeed, it may well be that most philosophers think freedom and determinism are compatible.)27 So, since the freedom to perform multiple different acts is not obviously inconsistent with determinism, BFR allows that someone who believes determinism could nevertheless make tough choices without thereby holding explicitly inconsistent beliefs. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, BFR can honor D3.

Of course, BFR does entail that someone who makes tough choices while believing she lacks freedom holds explicitly inconsistent beliefs. So BFR entails that a maker of tough choices who is also a hard determinist—i.e., someone who believes incompatibilism plus determinism—has explicitly inconsistent beliefs. But the thesis that a hard determinist could make tough choices without holding explicitly contradictory beliefs is (to put it mildly) highly questionable.28 Unlike D3, then, the claim that a hard determinist

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26 Cf. van Inwagen (1983: 18): “I shall not assume that either of [incompatibilism and compatibilism] is prima facie right. I shall treat them as philosophical theses of equal initial plausibility, and this, it seems to me, is the only reasonable way to approach the Compatibility Problem.”


28 For arguments for, and defense of, the thesis that any such hard determinist holds inconsistent beliefs, see, e.g., van Inwagen (1983) as well as Coffman and Warfield (2005).
could make tough choices without explicitly contradicting himself is much too controversial to count as anything like an adequacy constraint on theorizing about the epistemology of making tough choices.

The upshot of the last several paragraphs is that BFR explains D1–D3 at least as well as does premise (2) of the TCA. My defense of the two questionable steps in my objection to the TCA is now complete. My overall conclusion, then, is that the best attempt to show that being omniprescient rules out acting in certain ways—what we’ve called the Tough Choices Argument—fails due to its dialectical dependence on the alleged incompatibility of omniprescience and freedom. Contrary to what proponents of arguments like the TCA have claimed, such arguments do not constitute novel problems for the conception of God embraced by traditional theists.29

REFERENCES


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