



A Study of John Martin Fischer's View Regarding Divine Foreknowledge and Man's Moral Responsibility

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain and study a new approach by Fischer in solving the possible conflict between God's fore and infallible knowledge with the moral responsibility of the agent. Even though, on one hand, Fischer considers attributes such as knowledge to be essential and infallible Divine characteristics and also attributes temporal non-Thomistic eternity to God within the temporal framework of material existents and ultimately accepts the Fixity of the Past Principle and man's lack of control over temporally expired events and at first glance is faced with the conflict between such foreknowledge with man's free will in his actions; however, his type of view regarding the essence of man's free will frees him from this challenge. In Fischer's Frankfurter explanation, free will is not a factor preceded by man's ability to attempt an alternative act in the opposite course and therefore, even if Divine knowledge is synonymous with the one-sidedness of action, such a consequence would not be equal to man's loss of volition and free will. In this article, after presenting a short explanation for Fischer's view regarding Divine foreknowledge and addressing the Fixity of the Past Principle and the possibilities of alternatives and Fischer's Frankfurter approach in encountering that, we will assess Fischer's solution and observe that, anyway, envisioning the existence of an alternative for actions to actualize the free will of the agent is unavoidable.



Keywords

Fixed reality, Fischer, Frankfurter model, Fixity of the Past Principle, free will.

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Summary

The possible incompatibility between God's foreknowledge and the free will of the agent shows that this issue is wide-ranging: if God has infallible knowledge of all of man's actions before he has performed them, essentially, is there the possibility of the free will of the agent and his choice between alternative actions? According to John Martin Fischer, God, as a person, is absolutely knowledgeable, such that at all times, like t and in all propositions like P , He is completely aware that P will take place in time t ; only and only if the proposition P is true at the time of t . Apart from this, God, as a person, in all possible worlds, possesses absolute and universal knowledge. It is clear that in this explanation, the object of God's fore and essential knowledge has a universal and comprehensive range and, as a result, includes man's apparently voluntary actions as well. However, wouldn't such knowledge be inconsistent and contradictory with man's free will and freedom to act?

Reconstructing Fischer's approach and arranging a notable solution by paying heed to his collection of views and if possible, proving the incompatibility of Divine fore and infallible knowledge with the free will of the moral agent depends on inserting two other premises to his claims regarding God and His fore and universal knowledge. The first is that Fischer believes in our lack of control over the past and more precisely, in the Fixity of the Past Principle and second, according to him, free will and voluntariness of the moral agent is based on the ability to choose and attempt the possibility of an alternative by the person.

Regarding the first condition, it is important to note that like Van Inwagen in the Indirect Consequence Argument, Fischer too believes in our lack of control over the past and more precisely, in the Fixity of the Past Principle. According to this view, the past is fixed in the present and is out of our control and as a result, we cannot make changes in its events through our present choices. Therefore, in the event that the performance of a particular act is preceded by a change in a past reality, due to the fixity and establishment of past phenomena, a person would not be able to perform such an action. By accepting the Fixity of the Past Principle, it seems we cannot escape the incompatibility between Divine foreknowledge and the free will of the moral agent.

However, in dealing with the second inserted premise, instead of denying the truth value of possible future propositions or the possibility of Divine knowledge over them, he tries to distinguish between two meanings of freedom and in this way, clarifies that in one meaning, freedom necessitates man's voluntariness in performing or abandoning an act and as a result is a two-way reality and in another meaning, it is only synonymous with freedom

in performing an action and is not preceded by man's control and choice in abandoning an act. According to Fischer's Frankfurter approach, in some cases there are conditions which do not force a person to perform an act; however, they make abstaining from acting upon them improbable for him and despite all these voluntary factors and from a moral perspective, he is considered responsible.

Fischer's approach, with all its importance in defending free will and moral responsibility and its compatibility with phenomena such as causal necessity and Divine foreknowledge, is faced with two main problems. The first is that in this approach, the interfering Frankfurter essence at the beginning of his interference in the alternative process has not been revised. Therefore, it is still not clear whether we are simply facing an "unreal interferer" whose interference starts as soon as he receives any type of reliable context and sign which indicates the occurrence of choice or an act against the desire and inclination of the interferer or a "conditional interferer" is at work; one who displays physical and even spiritual actions inconsistent with his own inclinations and desires? Another problem is that in the Frankfurter models, the complete and absolute negation of alternatives to the moral agent would result in the lack of his free will and moral responsibility.