1. Plantinga on the foreknowledge argument

A being counts as omniscient just in case (1) that being believes all true propositions; and (2) that being believes no propositions that are false. Using “God” as a name (rather than as a title) assume that if the individual named God exists, that individual is essentially omniscient. This is to say that the individual named God possesses the attribute of omniscience in every possible world in which that individual exists. It follows that in every possible world in which God exists, if a proposition P is true, God believes P and if God believes P, P is true. Grant secondly, that if God exists, she is everlasting, i.e., that God is a being whose life extends indefinitely both forwards and backwards in time. Finally, allow that if God exists at given time T and if some event (including a human action) occurs (or is performed) at a time subsequent to T, God believes at T that the event (or action) in question occurs (or is performed) at the time it occurs (or is performed) subsequent to T. So, for example, if some individual (Jones) performs some action (X) at some time (T2) (say Jones mows his lawn or cooks an omelet at T2), then God believes at a prior time (T1) that Jones mows his lawn or cooks an omelet at T2. What I argued in a paper entitled “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action” (1965) and again in the fourth chapter of a book entitled God and Timelessness (1970) is that under the circumstances just imagined, if God exists and if Jones does X at T2, it is not within Jones’ power at T2 to do other than X. Following Hasker, I shall refer to the controlling premise in that argument as “P6”. I quote P6 from the first of the texts just mentioned.

If God existed at T1 and if God believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2, then, if it was within Jones’ power at T2 to refrain from doing X, then (1) it was within Jones power at T2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at T1, or (2) it was within Jones’ power at T2 to do something which would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief he held at T1, or (3) it was within Jones power at T2 to do something that would have brought it about that any person who believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2 (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief and thus was not God – that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at T1) did not exist at T1.

My claim was that no one of the three alternatives itemized in the consequent of P6 can be accepted. If we suppose that God is essentially omnis-
cient, then "God holds a false belief" is contradictory and, accordingly, 1 is false on the grounds that it is never within one's power to act in such a way that a state of affairs having a contradictory description obtains. On the other hand, if God exists and believes at T1 that Jones does X at T2, then both 2 and 3 are false on the grounds that it is not within one's power at a given time so to act that a belief held at an earlier time or an individual existing at an earlier time was not held or did not exist at that earlier time. I concluded that if God exists and is essentially omniscient as well as everlasting, then no one has power at any time to do anything other than what one actually does.

In *God, Freedom and Evil* (1974) Plantinga reviewed the argument just summarized as follows:

Consider:

(51) God existed at T1 and God believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2 and it was within Jones' power at T2 to refrain from doing X at T2

What Pikes means to say, I believe, is that either (51) entails

(52) It was within Jones' power at T2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at T1

or (51) entails

(53) It was within Jones' power at T2 to do something that would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief he held at T1

or it entails

(54) It was within Jones' power at T2 to do something that would have brought it about that anyone who believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2 (one of whom was by hypothesis God) held a false belief and thus was not God – that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at T1) did not exist at T1.

The remainder of Pike's reasoning consists in arguing that each of (52), (53) and (54) is necessarily false, if God is essentially omniscient; hence (51) is necessarily false if God is essentially omniscient, which means that God's being essentially omniscient is incompatible with human freedom.
Plantinga then argued that although I was right in supposing that (52) and (54) are both unacceptable, neither is entailed by (51) and thus neither constitutes a threat for the theological compatibilist. As regards (53), Plantinga reformulated it so:

(53b) It was within Jones' power at T2 to do something such that if he had done it, then God would not have held the belief that in fact he did hold.

And speaking of (53b) Plantinga then said: "This follows from (51) but is perfectly innocent." The argument for the perfect innocence of (53b) is given in the sentences immediately following. They read as follows:

For again suppose that (51) is true and consider a (possible) world W in which Jones refrains from doing X. If God is essentially omniscient, then in W He is omniscient and hence does not believe at T1 that Jones will do X at T2. So what follows from (51) is the harmless assertion that it was within Jones' power to do something such that if he had done it, then God would not have held a belief that in fact (in the actual world) He did hold.

The conclusion drawn was that my argument for theological determinism fails.

Before leaving this part of my paper, I want to add some comments designed to focus attention on what I take to be the issue of consequence in the exchange just reviewed.

In "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action", the pivotal premise in the argument (P6) has the form a conditional with a consequent having three disjuncts. Using Plantinga's numbering, it says: "(51) entails either (52) or (53b) or (54)." However, in the first of passages quoted from Plantinga above, P6 is converted into a disjunction with three conditional alterns. On Plantinga's reading P6 says: "Either (51) entails (52) or (51) entails (53b) or (51) entails (54)." Now Plantinga says that (51) does not entail (52) and that (51) does not entail (54) but that (51) does entail (53b). This, I think, is wrong. While Plantinga is right in thinking that (51) does not entail (52) and that (51) does not entail (54), in my opinion (51) does not entail (53b) either. If what is written on the board is an odd number smaller than 6, it does not follow that it is 1 and it does not follow that it is 3 and it does not follow that it is 5. What follows is that it is either 1 or 3 or 5. This is awkward. From the very beginning the exchange between
Plantinga and myself was obscured by a misunderstanding concerning the logical structure of P6. It was further confused by what I regard as an error on Plantinga's part concerning the logical relation between (51) and (53b). Still, in my opinion, the only point of any real importance is this: Since Plantinga claimed that (51) entails (53b) he both accepted P6 and, in effect, reduced the issue between us to a single question, viz., whether (53b) is acceptable, i.e., (using Plantinga's words) whether (53b) is "perfectly innocent" or "harmless".

Now, given this understanding of the issue between Plantinga and myself, what shall we say about Plantinga's arguments for the claim that (51) does not entail (52) and that (51) does not entail (54)? Without reviewing the specific content of these arguments, we can see that the structure of the controversy precludes their having any significant role to play in the debate. P6 tells us that if (51) is true, then either (52) or (53b) or (54) is true. Plantinga agrees – he insists that (51) entails (53b). But with this much granted, to argue the absence of logical connection between (51)–(52) and (51)–(54) is to engage in a kind of procedural detour. At this point in the argument, the needs of Plantinga's program require only one additional element, viz., his argument for the claim that (53b) is harmless.

Unfortunately, this organizational feature of the exchange between Plantinga and myself was missed in some of the literature that accumulated around it. For example, in the first section of his essay "Pike on Possible Worlds, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom," Joshua Hoffman claimed that the argument of my original paper rests on the claim that (51) entails (52) and thus that (what he called) the "crux" of the argument between Plantinga and myself turns on the question of whether this entailment holds. Hoffman then reviewed with approval Plantinga's proof for the contention that (51) does not entail (52). He concluded that this proof effectively refutes my original incompatibilist argument. This was a mistake on Hoffman's part. I suspect he was mislead by the fact that the first, the most fully developed and, by far, the most convincing part of Plantinga's critical response to my paper is his argument for the claim that (51) does not entail (52). However, if we agree to abide by Plantinga's structuring of the discussion, this part of his argument is an elaborated aside having no real bearing on anything I claimed in my paper. The real "crux" of the issue between Plantinga and myself is not whether (51) entails (52). It is, rather, whether (53b) is acceptable. Given that Plantinga shoulders the burden of showing that my original argument fails, this
reduces to the question of whether his proof for the harmlessness of (53b) is effective.

2. Alston on Plantinga

Turning now to Alston's analysis of Plantinga's argument, we must begin by specifying two competing analyses of "power":

The Libertarian Analysis of Power:

It is within S's power to do A at $T = df$. It is really possible that S do A at $T$.

Pre-analytically (Alston tells us) "what is really possible at $T$ is what is 'left open' by what has happened up to $T$. It is that the non-occurrence of which is not necessitated by what has happened up to $T.'" More precisely:

E is really possible at $T = df$. There is no [hard] state of affairs prior to $T$, $F$, such that either (a) not-E is entailed by the conjunction of $F$ and some causal laws without being entailed by either conjunct alone, or (b) not-E is entailed by $F$ alone.

This definition covers two cases, viz., (a) the case in which E is what Alston calls "causally possible", i.e., not entailed by the description of some prior event or circumstances ($F$) together with causal laws; and (b) the case in which E is "situationally logically possible", i.e., not entailed by the description of past facts alone. This feature of the definition is designed to assure that the Libertarian sense of "power" has application not only in discussions of causal determinism, but also in discussions of theological determinism. In the latter case, the threat of determinism rests on a logical rather than a causal connection between some circumstance prior to $T$ and the event(s) occurring at $T$. The general point is this: The Libertarian sense of the phrase, "it is within S's power to do A at $T'" requires that there not be what Hasker has labeled "precluding circumstances" prior to $T$ that make it impossible for S to do A.9 Alston has noted that precluding circumstances come in two varieties, viz., those that causally and those that logically necessitate that S does not do A at $T$.

It is important that the states of affairs mentioned in the definition given above be restricted to those that contemporary philosophers have come to refer to as "hard" facts about (or "hard" states of affairs in) the past relative to $T$. $F$ counts as a hard fact about the past relative to $T$ if, $F$ is (let
us say) fully accomplished or over-and-done-with prior to $T$. So, to use Alston’s example, the fact that I was offered a job yesterday is a hard fact about the past relative to today. Such facts as these contrast with “soft” facts about the past relative to $T$. The fact that yesterday I was offered a job that I turned down at noon today would be a soft fact about the past relative to noon today. Though that fact is a fact about yesterday, it was not (as Alston puts it) “fully constituted” until noon today. Alston notes that as vague as it is, the distinction between hard and soft facts about the past is crucial in the present discussion. The fact that I was offered a job yesterday that I turned down at noon today entails that I turned the job down at noon today. But no one would argue from this alone that at noon today it was not within my power to accept the job, i.e., that at the time of my action my accepting the job was not a real possibility.

In contrast to the Libertarian sense of “power”, Alston defines what he calls the “Compatibilist” conception of power as follows:

It is within $S$’s power at $T$ to do $A$ $=$df. If, $S$ were to will (choose, decide...) at $T$ to do $A$, $S$ would do $A$.

Let’s suppose that $S$ does not do $A$ at $T$. Still, on this second analysis, it was within $S$’s power to do $A$ just in case it is true that if at $T$ $S$ had chosen to do $A$, $S$ would have done $A$ at $T$. This is to say (in Alston’s words) that “as far as $A$ is concerned, $S$’s will would have been effective.”$^{10}$ The central idea here is that on this analysis it could be within $S$’s power to do $A$ even if $S$’s action (not-$A$) had been causally or logically necessitated by some state of affairs that obtained prior to $T$. In fact, on this analysis it could be within $S$’s power to do $A$ even if $S$’s choice not to do $A$ had been causally or logically necessitated by some state of affairs that obtained prior to $T$. For one employing the Compatibilist conception of power, it is within $S$’s power at $T$ to do $A$ if the following subjunctive conditional is true: IF $S$ had chosen to do $A$ at $T$, $S$ would have done $A$ at $T$. This is all that is required.

Returning to Plantinga’s argument for the claim that divine foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom, we suppose that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$ and (accordingly) that God believes at $T_1$ that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$. Still, Plantinga says, there is no reason to deny that it is within Jones power at $T_2$ to refrain from doing $X$. The power in question is the power described in (53b), i.e., the power at $T_2$ to do something such that had he done it, God would not have held the belief he, in fact, held at $T_1$. Alston argues as follows:$^{11}$ “God believes at $T_1$ that Jones does $X$ at $T_2$”
entails "Jones does X at T2" and thus also entails "It is not the case that Jones refrains from doing X at T2". If we suppose that the divine belief at T1 is a hard fact about T1 (and Alston notes that Plantinga did not question this supposition in God, Freedom & Evil), it follows that in the case imagined there is a condition antecedent to T2 that logically precludes Jones' not doing X at T2. Given the Libertarian sense of "power" it follows that in the case imagined, it is not within Jones' power at T2 to refrain from doing X. The only alternative is thus to suppose that Plantinga's reasoning rests implicitly on the Compatibilist sense of "power". Alston finishes the argument with a powerful stroke. Formulating a causal analogue of Plantinga's (51) which Alston labels "(51A)", he recasts Plantinga's defense of (53b) as a defense of the position that power-to-do-otherwise is compatible with causal determinism. Alston writes:

Consider:

(51A) Causal factors obtain prior to T2 that determine Jones to do X at T2, and it was within Jones' power to refrain from doing X at T2

Suppose that (51A) is true, and consider a world W in which Jones refrains from doing X. If causal determinism holds in this world W then either causal laws in W are different from the way they are in the actual world or some of the causal factors that affect what Jones does at T2 are different from what we have in the actual world. So what follows from (51A) is the harmless assertion that it was within Jones power to do something such that if he had done it, then (assuming causal determinism still holds) either causal laws or causal factors would have been different from what they are in the actual world.

Alston says that this argument for the claim that power-to-do-otherwise is compatible with causal determinism is "at least as strong" as the one Plantinga offers for the claim that power-to-do-otherwise is compatible with divine foreknowledge. He continues:

If Jones can have it within his power to do something such that if he had done it then what God believed prior to that would have been somewhat different, then surely Jones can have it within his power to do something such that if he had done it causal factors or causal laws would have been somewhat different.

Alston ends with a re-affirmation of the conclusion drawn above:
Thus if Plantinga were in position to argue as he does for the compatibility of Jones' being able to do otherwise with divine foreknowledge, he would equally be in position to argue for the compatibility of Jones' being able to do otherwise with causal determinism. And that is just to say, once more, that Plantinga's argument goes through only on a compatibilist conception of "within one's power".

In my opinion, this argument is both highly penetrating and almost entirely convincing. I now want to re-formulate that part of it that I think can hardly be denied.

Consider again Plantinga's (53b). It reads:

It was within Jones' power at T2 to do something such that if he had done it, then God would not have held the belief that he in fact did hold.

Now Plantinga holds that in the context established by the assumption of (51), (53b) is true. But the truth of (53b) depends on two factors, viz., (1) the truth of what David Lewis has called a "backtracking counterfactual conditional"12 to wit:

BTC1: Had Jones refrained from doing X at T2, God would not have believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2;

and (2) the truth of the claim that Jones had the power at T2 to act as described in the antecedent of BTC1. Using the phrase "backtracking power" to refer to this kind of power (i.e., power to act in the way described in the antecedent of a true backtracking counterfactual), what Alston seems to me to be seeing very clearly is that backtracking power is precluded on a Libertarian analysis of "power". This is because the very conditions that assure the truth of the relevant backtracking counterfactual are conditions that preclude the presence of Libertarian power. In the case before us, God's belief at T1 entails Jones' action at T2. It is this connection that guarantees the truth of BTC1: Without it BCT1 would have no claim to credence. But given this conceptual connection, Jones' action at T2 is (in Alston's words) "situationally logically necessitated" and the contrary refraining action is thus not really possible. Similar remarks hold for the backtracking power assigned to Jones in Alston's causal-analogue of Plantinga's argument. I'll take time here to formulate this argument in a way that displays its parallel with the one just reviewed.

In the argument for the truth of (53b), the truth of BTC1 is grounded in
a conceptual connection, i.e., the one expressed in the formula ""God believes P' entails 'P'". However, this connection is not, itself, mentioned in BGT1. It is, instead, stipulated in advance. In effect, the truth of BTC1 rests on an item that has been built into the context of inquiry. This is to say that truth of BTC1 is assured by the fact that the inquiry is conducted in a context where the relevant conceptual connection is taken as a constant. So now let's make a similar arrangement as regards causal connections (causal laws) before approaching the analogous argument for the causal case. We shall limit attention to circumstances (possible worlds) in which the operative causal laws are those that hold in the actual world. This is to say that the context of inquiry will be one in which the set of causal laws operative in the actual world is taken as a constant. Further, we must stipulate that the causal laws postulated in the discussion describe connections, not just (in Hume's words) "constant conjunctions". This is necessary because the argument to be considered will require the assumption that human beings cannot—not just that they do not—act in ways that violate the laws in question. Agreeing now that causal determinism holds in the actual world, we have built a context in which the truth of the following backtracking counterfactual is guaranteed. 

BTC2. Had Jones refrained from doing X at T2, then causal factors present at T1 would have been different than in fact they were.

Note that the truth of BTC2 would not be assured in a context lacking the elements stipulated above. For example, suppose we had not agreed to limit attention to circumstances (worlds) in which there are no events at T2 that are not produced by events at T1—where "produced" entails "connected" and not just "conjoined". We would then have no reason to think that BTC2 is true. We could easily suppose that had Jones refrained from doing X at T2, that would have been (at best) an exception to an (at best) otherwise regular correlation between events of the sort that occurred at T1 and refraining actions of the sort described in the antecedent of BCT2. But, if this is right, then given the conditions that underwrite the truth of BTC2, Jones could not be assigned Libertarian power to refrain from doing X at T2. The relevant conditions entail that Jones' action at T2 is causally necessitated by events at T1 and thus that the correlative refraining action is (in Alston's sense) not really possible.

What these reflections establish, I think, is that Plantinga cannot admit to the truth of (53b) in the context established by (51) unless he rejects the Libertarian analysis of "power". On this point I think that Alston's
argument is decisive. Both in the foreknowledge case and in its causal-analogue, backtracking power requires assumptions that negate the very possibility of Libertarian power.

3. Critique of Alston

I shall use the following notation in the discussion to follow:

\[ R = \text{God (who is essentially omniscient) exists At T1.}\]
\[ Q = \text{God (who exists at T1) believes at T1 that Jones does X at T2.}\]
\[ S = \text{Jones does X at T2.}\]
\[ P_{jt2} = \text{It is within Jones power at T2 so to act that...}\]
\[ P = \text{There is a possible world in which...}\]

Following is a formulation of Plantinga's argument for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom which I shall refer to hereafter as “PAC”

1. Assume \( R \& Q \)
2. Assume \( P_{jt2}(\text{not-S}) \)
3. \( \therefore P_{jt2}(\text{not-Q}) \)
4. 3 is harmless
5. Proof of 4: Even assuming \( R \) and \( Q \), \( P(\text{not-S} \& \text{not-Q}) \)

Gloss: Given that Jones does X at T2, line 1 records the metaphysical assumptions that generate the foreknowledge problem. For purposes of this discussion, they are fixed, non-negotiable items. Lines 1 and 2 together make up Plantinga's (51). Line 3 is Plantinga's (53b). Plantinga's claim is that (51) entails (53b). This is to say that if we assume \( R \& Q \) together with \( P_{jt2}(\text{not-S}) \) we can derive the claim that at T2 Jones has the backtracking power to do something such that were he to do it, God (who exists at T1) would not believe at T1 that Jones does X at T2. However, Plantinga claims that this conclusion is “innocent”, i.e., “harmless” (line 4). And though he does not tell us exactly what this means, context makes clear that the import of 4 is that “\( P_{jt2}(\text{not-Q}) \)” is consistent with the fixed assumption “Q.” The proof of 4 consists of the following observation: Even if we suppose that in the actual world God exists at T1 and believes at T1 that Jones does X at T2, there is still a possible world in which Jones refrains from doing X at T2 (not-S) and (accordingly) in which God (who exists at T1) does not believe at T1 that Jones does X at T2 (not-Q).
3.1 Two points of clarification

(1) Assuming for the moment that lines 1 and 2 are jointly consistent (as Plantinga obviously supposes them to be), the first question to ask about the argument just formulated is whether 3 follows from the conjunction of 1 and 2. As noted in the fourth paragraph of the first section above, it does not. Even if we discount the first of the options itemized in the consequent of P6, what follows is only the disjunctive proposition “Pjt2(not-Q) or Pjt2(not-R)”. Still as I said earlier, this error is of no consequence for our present concerns. We can assume that Plantinga has reasons of his own for disallowing “Pjt2(not-R)” and let it go at that. For purposes of our discussion, then, I shall assume that the above argument reaches line 3 without mishap.

(2) In his contribution to the volume entitled _Alvin Plantinga_, Philip Quinn supposes that when Plantinga characterized (53b) as “innocent” or “harmless” (line 4), what he meant was that (53b) does not attribute to Jones (in Quinn’s words) “power to bring it about that a contradictory state of affairs obtains”. So, for example, (53b) is harmless in so far as it does not imply that it is within Jones power at T2 to act in such a way that an essentially omniscient being would have held a false belief at T1. More to the point, (53b) is harmless in so far as it does not imply that it is within Jones’ power at T2 to act in such a way that God would have both believed at T1 and not believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2. However, it is clear, I think, that this cannot be what Plantinga had in mind when declaring (53b) to be harmless. The problem is this: In my original paper, I argued that the first alternative listed in the consequent of P6 – i.e., Plantinga’s (52) – must be rejected because it attributes to Jones a power to do something such that had he done it a contradictory state of affairs would have obtained. But this is not the reason I gave for rejecting the second alternative – i.e., Plantinga’s (53b). What I argued was that the second alternative is unacceptable because it attributes to Jones backtrack powering at T2, i.e., power to do something such that had he done it a state of affairs which (by hypothesis) obtained at T1 (God’s believing that Jones would do X at T2) would not have obtained at T1. Framed in terms of the notation we are using, I was not troubled by the idea that (53b) entails “Pjt2(Q and not-Q)”. It is clear (at least to me) that it has no such implication: no proof would be needed to establish its innocence on this score. The problem I raised was, rather, that since (53b) affirms “Pjt2(not-Q)” in a context in which “Q” is taken as a fixed assumption, to endorse
(53b) is, in effect, to affirm that the conjunction of "Q" and "Pjt2(not-Q)" is consistent. The position I took in my original paper is that the conjunction of "Q" and "Pjt2(not-Q)" is not consistent. The upshot is that if (with Quinn) we read Plantinga's proof for the harmlessness of (53b) as an effort to show only that (53b) does not entail "Pjt2(Q and not-Q)", Plantinga's argument fails to address the grounds I cited in my original paper for rejecting the second disjunct in the consequent of P6, i.e., for rejecting (53b). Since Plantinga's proof was obviously intended to show that my rejection of this second option was unwarranted, I think we must assume that Quinn's is mistaken in his estimate of the point Plantinga was making when claiming that (53b) is harmless.

Regarding the argument that we are now considering, Alston's position is this: If the power-operator "Pjt2" is understood as the Libertarian sense of "power", then "Pjt2(not-Q)" is not consistent with "Q". Line 4 is false. However, if "Pjt2" is understood as the Compatibilist sense of "power", then "Pjt2(not-Q)" is consistent with Q. Line 4 is true. Alston concludes that the best reading of Plantinga is the second. This is so because the second interpretation provides Plantinga with his strongest case, i.e., his argument "goes through" (Alston tells us) only if "Pjt2" carries the Compatibilist value. My own opinion is that while the first premise of Alston's argument is unassailable and the second is most likely correct, the conclusion is premature. We still have one more thing to consider, viz., line 5, i.e., Plantinga's proof for the claim that the conjunction of "Q" and "Pjt2(not-Q)" is consistent. As Alston says in a portion of his text that I did not review above, "If you want to know what is proved, look at the proof." As applied in the present case, I think that this Wittgensteinian maxim dictates that if we really want to know what sense of "power" Plantinga is using in his text, we must analyze the proof he offers for the claim that Jones can have power to do otherwise even though God holds a belief at T1 about what he will do at T2.

So what about the proof? Even on the assumption that in the actual world God (who is essentially omniscient) exists and believes at T1 that Jones does X at T2, Plantinga sees that there is a possible world (not the actual world) in which Jones refrains from doing X at T2 and (accordingly) in which God (who exists at T1) does not believe at T1 that Jones does X at T2. But how does this observation bear on the question of whether "Pjt2(not-Q)" is consistent with "Q"? On the surface it would appear to have no bearing whatsoever. Still, try this: Grant that in the actual world God exists and believes at T1 that Jones does X at T2 and
that this is consistent with the claim that there is a possible world (not the actual world) in which Jones refrains from doing X at T2. It follows that even if “Q” is true, Jones could refrain from doing X at T2. And since any world in which God exists is one in which a refraining action on Jones’ part requires (call it) a refraining-belief on God’s part, we must conclude that even if “Q” is true, Jones could so act that God (who exists at T1) does not believe at T1 that Jones does X at T2.

Is this alright? Indeed it is. But it is important to note that the conclusion we have reached is not yet the one we are seeking. In order to make this point clear, I shall expand our conceptual repertory to include the notion of a third operator – call it the “action” operator. This will require that we supplement our existing notation with the following item:

\[ \text{Ajt2} = \text{Jones so acts at T2 that...} \]

Taking Q as a fixed assumption, the argument just articulated is this:

1. “P(not-S)” is consistent with “Q”
2. [Given Q] “not-S” entails “Ajt2(not-Q)”
3. \[ \therefore \] “P(Ajt2(not-Q))” is consistent with “Q”.

But “P(Ajt2(not-Q))” expresses only the logical possibility that Jones acts in such a way at T2 that God does not believe at T1 that Jones does X at T2. Thus line 5 tells us only that Q together with a certain logical-possibility of action on Jones’ part can be jointly affirmed without contradiction. However, this is not the conclusion we want. What still must be shown is that Q together with a certain power-possibility of action on Jones’ part can be jointly affirmed without contradiction, i.e. that “Pjt2(not-Q)” is consistent with “Q”. So now the critical question is how Plantinga gets from the conclusion in hand to the one he is trying to establish. The hypothesis I want to consider is this:

In the section of \textit{God, Freedom And Evil} that we are studying, Plantinga is assuming that a statement in which is affirmed a power-possibility for human action simply \textit{is} a statement in which is affirmed a logical-possibility for human action. In other circumstances I would put this by saying that Plantinga has here simply confused two quite distinct modal concepts, \textit{viz.}, power-possibility and logical possibility. However, in the present discussion I shall treat this assumption as the implicit adaption of a conception of power which, in effect, affirms a meaning-equivalence between statements of the form Pjt2(...) and statements of the form...
P(Ajt2[...]). And since (as we shall see) this conception embodies a radically optimistic estimate of the range of human capability, in the remainder of this paper I shall refer to it as the "Castle-in-the-air" or, more shortly, the "Castelian" conception of power. In order to facilitate comparison between it and the formulations given by Alston of the Libertarian and Compatibilist analyses of "power", I'll frame the Castelian analysis as follows:

It is within S's power at T to do A =df. There is a possible world in which S does A at T.

What reasons are there for thinking that the hypothesis just formulated is true? The first consideration is obvious: If we assign a Castelian value to the power operator working in line 3 of PAC, Plantinga's proof for the harmlessness of 3 reaches its intended conclusion and, as a consequence, his argument for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom is thereby completed. If

It is within Jones power at T2 to do something such that were he to do it, God would not believe at T1 that Jones does X at T2

simply means

There is a possible world in which Jones so acts at T2 that God does not believe at T1 that Jones does X at T2,

then since Plantinga's proof establishes that the second of these statements is consistent with Q, it also establishes that the first of these statements is consistent with Q. However, a second and more important consideration is this: Unless we assign a Castelian value to the power operator working in line 3, line 4 is left without effective support and, as a consequence, PAC fails outright. Alston's suggestion that the argument goes through if a Compatibilist (rather than a Castelian) value is assigned to "Pjt2" is not correct. I'll finish this section with an argument designed to support this second line of thought. The argument in question is Alstonean in that it proceeds via the probe of a causal-analogue to uncover the implications of the reasoning-pattern operative in PAC.

I want to consider a case in which some human agent performs an action that a soft determinist such as Schlick or Hume would classify as an action that is not freely performed, i.e., an act which is such that it is not
within the agent's power to do otherwise. Since negative actions such as not mowing the lawn are easier to use when dealing with this category, I'll work with one of these. Let "J" in the argument to follow stand for the statement "Jones does not mow his lawn at T2". Though somewhat awkward from the point of view of ordinary English, this will require that "not-J" be read as the positive statement "Jones mows his lawn at T2". In the argument to follow the possibility operators "Pjt2" and "P" will carry the value assigned earlier. "H" will be used to stand for following statement:

H. At T1, Jones is shackled to the furnace in his basement after having been beaten into a state of near unconsciousness by his neighbor who can not stand the sound of Jones' lawnmower. Other causal factors obtaining at T1 are sufficient to assure that Jones' position in the basement does not change until after T2.

The following argument is PAC'. It is a causal-analogue of PAC.

1'. Assume: H
2'. Assume: Pjt2 (not-J)
3'. :: Pjt2 (not-H)
4'. 3' is harmless
5'. Proof of 4': Even assuming H, P(not-J and not-H)

Gloss: Assume for the moment that the conjunction of lines 1' and 2' is consistent. If at T2 Jones has the power to mow his lawn (line 2'), then if we agree to restrict the context of inquiry to circumstances (worlds) in which causal determinism holds and in which causal laws are as they are in the actual world and describe causal connections rather than just constant conjunctions, we can assign Jones the backtracking power properly derived at 3'. However, (the argument continues) the conclusion reached at line 3' is harmless. This is to say that 3' does not conflict with anything posited in H. Limiting attention to the set of possible worlds just identified, this is shown by the fact that even if H is true in the actual world, there is a possible world (not the actual world) in which Jones mows his lawn at T2 and (accordingly) in which the factors itemized in H do not obtain at T1.

Assigning a Libertarian reading to the power-operator occurring in 2' and 3', this argument is a shambles. The causal deterministic theory assumed as a constant in the context of enquiry guarantees that Jones's action at T2 is causally necessitated by circumstances that obtain at T1 and
thus that no contrary action is really possible. Hence, the claim that it is within Jones power at T2 to mow his lawn (line 2') as well as the claim that Jones's has the backtracking power ascribed in 3' are both ruled out by elements of context. In this case, the argument collapse before we get to raise the question of primary interest, viz., whether 3' is consistent "H", i.e., whether "Pjt2(not-H)" is harmless.

However, if we assign a Compatibilist value to the power-operator used in lines 2' and 3', we get a different result. Here, neither 2' nor 3' is in conflict with the general causal deterministic contextual assumption. Rather, the problem with the argument rests with the special kind of deterministic circumstances explicitly postulated in H. The case imagined is one in which Jones is prevented from mowing his lawn because he is shackled to the furnace and is too weak to break his bonds. Outside factors thus compel Jones to do what he is doing, i.e., sit in the basement and not mow his lawn. In a nutshell, the case is one in which the governing soft deterministic conditional formula fails. It is simply not the case that IF at T2 Jones were to choose (decide, will, etc.) to mow his lawn, he would do so. The most immediate consequence is that 2' is not consistent with 1'.

The more important implication is this: Although in this case we can, at least, raise the question of whether the power ascription formulated in 3' is harmless (i.e., consistent with 1'), the answer is that it is not. The circumstances postulated in H not only prevent Jones from mowing his lawn at T2, they also prevent him from cooking an omelet, going to the bank...etc., i.e., they prevent him from doing anything at T2 that would entail the negation of H. The argument given in 5' for the harmlessness of 3' provides no reason for thinking that this verdict is mistaken.

But, of course, all of this changes when the power-operator used in lines 2' and 3' is given a Castelian interpretation. Though we assume causal determinism as a contextual constant and although we assume that the actual world is as it is portrayed in H, there is still a possible world (not the actual world) in which Jones mows his lawn at T2 and (accordingly) in which the circumstances described in H do not obtain. Thus in the actual world, Jones can be assigned power to mow his lawn (line 2') and, as a consequence, he can also be assigned the backtracking power affirmed in 3'. Line 3' is harmless. And what is important to see is that on the Castelian interpretation of "Pjt2", 3' is harmless for precisely the reason given in 5'.

Relying primarily on the reflections offered in the preceding two paragraphs, I now want to formulate two distinct (though connected)
reasons for rejecting Alston’s soft deterministic interpretation of PAC.

(1) Alston rightly insists that if Plantinga’s argument establishes the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, an argument of similar structure will establish the compatibility of power-to-do-otherwise and casual determinism. Following this lead, I am suggesting that if this argument-pattern works as indicated when dealing with the precluding circumstances postulated by casual determinists, it works to the same effect when dealing with the special precluding circumstances postulated in H. It should be clear that an argument of similar structure would be equally successful had we supposed in H that Jones was not only shackled to the furnace at T1, but had died from the beating suffered at the hands of his neighbor and was already beginning to stiffen at T2. But, of course, these last mentioned applications of Plantinga’s reasoning reach conclusions that no respectable soft determinist would either be inclined or obliged to accept. It thus seems clear that the conception of power working at the foundations of Plantinga’s reasoning is not the one utilized by Hume and Schlick. Whatever conception of power we may finally decide is involved in this case, it is obviously one which allows instances of power-to-do-otherwise that are excluded on the Compatibilist analysis just as the Compatibilist analysis allows instances of power-to-do-otherwise that are excluded on the Libertarian analysis.

(2) Can we say what it is about Plantinga’s reasoning-pattern that a soft determinist such as Hume or Schlick would find objectionable? I think we can.

If we assume a Compatibilist analysis of “power” in the case where Jones is shackled in the basement, the fact that there is a possible world (other than the actual world) in which Jones mows his lawn and in which Jones is not shackled in the basement, is not a reason for thinking that the backtracking power affirmed in line 3’ is compatible with the circumstances itemized in H. The only argument that would be relevant (though, in this case, not available) would be one in which it is shown that H does not preclude the truth of the conditional formula: “If at T2 Jones were to choose to mow his lawn, he would do so”. But, of course, this point has application not only in PAC’ but in PAC as well. If we assign a Compatibilist value to the power operator working in line 3 of PAC, the fact that there is a possible world (other than the actual world) in which Jones refrains from doing X at T2 and in which God does not believe at the T1 that Jones does X at T2 is simply not a reason for thinking that the backtracking power described in line 3 is compatible with the fixed
assumption Q. A soft determinist such as Hume or Schlick would insist that an argument designed to establish the consistency of these two items would have to be aimed at exhibiting the truth of the following soft deterministic thesis – call it "SDT":

Q is such as not to preclude the truth of the conditional formula: “If at T2 Jones were to choose to refrain from doing X, he would do so.”

Now with these thoughts in mind, assume that the power operator working in lines 2 and 3 of PAC is an expression of the Compatibilist conception of power. Since on this assumption line 3 is harmless only if SDT is true, on this assumption Plantinga’s proof for the harmless of 3 must be interpreted as an argument for the truth of SDT. But Plantinga’s proof is such as to be clearly irrelevant to the question of whether SDT is true. It follows that PAC is not successful if its power language is interpreted in accordance with the Compatibilist concept. Hume and Schlick would reject this argument on the grounds that line 5 not only does not settle, it does not even address the question of whether line 3 – Plantinga’s (53b) – is harmless.

Alston argues that we should assign a Compatibilist interpretation to the power language used in PAC on the grounds that the argument “goes through” only if the power operator working in (53b) is read in this way. But as we have just seen, Plantinga’s argument is not successful – i.e., it does not “go through” – when (53b) is read in this way. The upshot is that Alston’s soft deterministic reading of Plantinga’s argument is bereft of effective support. If we accept his suggestion concerning the conception of power underpinning the reasoning in Plantinga’s text, we must also reject the only reason he gives for accepting that suggestion in the first place.

My conclusion is this: Agreeing with Alston that Plantinga’s argument for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom in God, Freedom and Evil turns on a conception of power that is not articulated in the text, the conception in question is not the one that Alston supposes. So far as I can see there is just one candidate. Plantinga’s argument goes through, I submit, only on a Castelian analysis of “within one’s power”.

Postscript

In the essay mentioned earlier from the volume entitled Alvin Plantinga, Philip Quinn comments on what I have been referring to in this discussion
as the "Castelian" analysis of "power". Quinn is replying to an article I published in 197722 in which I first expressed the idea that Plantinga makes use of this analysis in his discussion of the foreknowledge problem in God, Freedom and Evil.

As Pike correctly notes, such an analysis would be mistaken: there are many things it is logically possible for an agent to do which are not within that agent's power. It is logically possible that I travel from the earth to the sun in three minutes, but it is surely not within my power to do so, since such a trip would require velocities precluded by a fundamental law of physics. However, as far as I can tell, Plantinga's argument depends on no such supposition about the analysis of the meaning of attributions of powers to human. As I have paraphrased that argument, it does make use of the relatively innocent assumption that

(29) It was within Jones' power to refrain from doing X at T2

entails

(30) There is some possible world in which Jones refrains from doing X at T2

To deny this entailment would be logically equivalent to asserting that it is logically possible both that it is within Jones' power to do a certain thing and that it is logically impossible that he does that thing. Surely this is false. But Plantinga nowhere even suggests that (30) tells us what (29) means. And since he does not even assume that (30) entails (29), he is not even committed to holding that (29) and (30) are logically equivalent.

Prior to the publication of Quinn's essay, these same criticisms of my hypothesis concerning Plantinga's argument had been advanced by Joshua Hoffman in the first section of the article mentioned earlier. The same complaint has since been repeated by Plantinga in an Appendix to his most recent article on the foreknowledge problem, viz., "Ockham's Way Out".23

I think that Quinn is right about two things, viz., (1) the Castelian analysis of "power" is utterly unacceptable; and (2) given that his paraphrase of Plantinga's argument correctly captures the thrust of the original, the latter does not require use of the Castelian analysis of "power". But the trouble here is that Quinn's paraphrase portrays Plantinga's proof for the harmlessness of (53b) as an effort to establish that
(53b) does not ascribe to Jones a power to do something such that were he to do it, a contradictory state of affairs would obtain. And, of course, that (if it needed any proof at all) was not what the proof in question was supposed to show. As mentioned earlier, if we assume that the proof was intended to exhibit the inadequacy of the reason I gave for rejecting the second alternative listed in the consequent of P6 (as I think we must), the proof was not designed to show that (53b) does not entail “Pjt2(Q and not-Q)”. What it was supposed to show is that the conjunction of “Q” and “Pjt2(not-Q)” is consistent. Since Quinn missed the point of the proof, it is no wonder that he also missed the place in the proof that requires the Castelian analysis of “power”. So far as I can see there is just one way in which Plantinga’s argument might be serviced to avoid this requirement. Though it would alter the structure of the original, one could add a premise. Using Quinn’s numbering system, the premise required would have to read: “(30) entails (29)”.

Regarding Hoffman’s failure to detect Castelian reasoning in Plantinga’s argument, I think that it, too, can be traced to a related (though distinct) misunderstanding about the single issue at stake in the exchange between Plantinga and myself. As noted earlier, Hoffman thought that the “crux” of the matter is whether Plantinga’s (51) entails Plantinga’s (52). And as Plantinga’s possible worlds discussion of this question readily shows, (51) does not entail (52). But, again, this is not the “crux” and this is not the possible worlds argument in which Plantinga displays his Castelian banner. Both the crux and the banner are located elsewhere – i.e., in Plantinga’s proof for the harmlessness of (53b).

As for Plantinga’s most recent insistence that in God, Freedom and Evil he did not employ the Castelian analysis of “power”, it would be implausible to suppose that he harbors either of the misunderstandings just identified. Further, I have discovered no other misunderstanding in Plantinga’s writings that could account for the fact that he rejects my Castelian analysis of his earlier reasoning. I thus have no way to explain his present position on this question.24

Notes

5. Harper Torchbooks, 1974; Section b, pp. 66–73.
6. I here disregard Plantinga's first interpretation of (53) – called "(53a)". This, I think, was included only for the sake of clarifying contrast and was not intended as a serious reading of (53).
7. I am here assuming that (53b) is equivalent to the second alternative listed in the consequent of P6. That they are equivalent may not be immediately apparent since the options listed in the consequence of P6 (including the second) were formulated in causal-sounding "bring about" language instead of the counterfactual language used in (53b). On this point I have two things to say. First, in the first section of my response to Saunders ("Of God and Freedom: A Rejoinder"; *Philosophical Review*, 1966) I disavowed any causal implications that might be thought to attach to the "bring about" locution used in "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action". The "bring-about" locution was then avoided in the formulation given in Chapter Four of *God and Timelessness*. Secondly, I am no longer convinced that in the present context, the presence of a *bona fide* causal "bring about" should make any difference anyway. For an interesting discussion of the distinction – better, lack of distinction – between causal and counterfactual power over the past, see Sec. V of William Hasker's "Foreknowledge and Necessity".
10. Alston, p. 22.
13. For an interesting discussion of the idea that backtracking counterfactuals are true in cases where they result from an instantiation of physical law, see Ch. IV of John Pollock's *The Foundations of Philosophical Semantics* (Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 117ff. I am indebted to Linda Zagzebski for this reference.
17. All of this was clarified pretty early in the game. See Sec. I of my response to Saunders (*Philosophical Review*, 1966) – especially the discussion in which I introduce the distinction between hard and soft facts. See also Marilyn Adams' "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact about the Past?" *Philosophical Review* (1967).
18. Of course, one could assume that Quinn is right and that Plantinga did not address the reason I gave for rejecting the second alternative listed in the consequent of P6. However, this renders Plantinga's response to me a non-response and thus makes it uninteresting in the extreme. For this reason, I do not take this suggestion seriously.
19. As Alston notes on page 24 of his text, I have some misgivings about the claim that Pjt2(not-Q) is consistent with Q when "Pjt2" is given a Com-
patibilist value. However, I shall not discuss that question here. For present purposes I shall simply assume that Alston is right on this point.

20. See p. 23.

21. In Section II of “Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom” (pp. 24–26), Alston develops a subtle and interesting argument for the claim that “SDT” is true. But this argument is not Plantinga’s nor is there anything in Plantinga’s text that could be construed as an endorsement of this or any other argument for the truth of SDT. I’m sure that Alston would agree.


24. I am indebted to William P. Alston for comments and criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper that resulted in a number of changes that I think were improvements. My colleague George Draper also worked through an earlier version of this paper with me. His criticisms and suggestions were of special benefit.