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Divine providence, simple foreknowledge, and the 'Metaphysical Principle'

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Abstract: **In this essay, I challenge David P. Hunt's defence of the utility of simple foreknowledge for divine providence against the 'Metaphysical Principle'. This principle asserts that circular causal loops are impossible. Hunt agrees with this principle but maintains that so long as the deity does not use simple foreknowledge in such a way that causal loops unfold, the Metaphysical Principle in not violated. I argue that Hunt's position still allows for the possibility of such causal loops and this itself is a breach of the Metaphysical Principle.**

In his groundbreaking essay, 'Divine providence and simple foreknowledge', David P. Hunt offers a defence of the utility of simple foreknowledge for divine providential control.[1] By simple foreknowledge, one means a passive awareness of future events, a knowledge not derived from divine preordination of events nor by middle knowledge. Rather, it is a kind of direct, perhaps intuitive, cognizance of the future events themselves. By providential control, one means 'an agent's capacity for affecting the future in an intentional way'.[2] According to many theistic philosophers, simple foreknowledge would be of no real help to the deity's providential control.

Consider the following situation. Suppose that God foresees that Larry will marry Lucy on 13 June and will live happily ever after. In turn, suppose that in light of this information, on some date prior to 13 June, the deity advises Larry to marry Lucy. The deity does this because, through foreknowledge, He foreknows that Larry will live happily ever after, wedded to Lucy. In turn, imagine that because Larry is a pious fellow, he decides to heed the divine advice and marry Lucy. Hunt identifies two principles that might undermine this proposal. In this essay, our concern will be with one of these, namely, the Metaphysical Principle.

According to the Metaphysical Principle, the situation envisioned above could not unfold because it would involve an impossible 'circle of dependence'.[3] On the one hand, in using knowledge of the future to inform the divine advice-giving,

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God's counsel appears to depend upon the events foreknown – in this case, Larry's and Lucy's marriage and blissful post-wedding life. On the other hand, Larry's decision to get married, along with his subsequent happy life with Lucy, seem to depend (in part) upon the divine advice. That is, Larry will marry Lucy partly because, at some earlier time, God advises Larry to do so. But a kind of impossible causal loop seems to emerge in all of this. God's advice depends upon a set of foreknown events that, in turn, depend upon that same divine counsel. Or perhaps more precisely: God's decision to advise Larry depends upon a belief about a set of foreknown events that, in turn, depend upon God's decision to advise. The following principle seems to be violated by such a scenario.

(MP) It is impossible that a decision depend on a belief which depends on a future event which depends on the original decision.[4]

Hunt names this the 'Metaphysical Principle' and designates the conundrum that arises from this principle the 'Metaphysical Problem'.

Hunt sees the Metaphysical Principle at work in various contemporary attacks on the utility of simple foreknowledge for divine providence.[5] He contends, however, that this principle fails to overturn the providential utility of simple foreknowledge. To see this, Hunt bids us to consider first how limited simple foreknowledge conceivably could aid providential control. Suppose, says Hunt, that an individual could foreknow that on some upcoming date a warrant will be issued for his own arrest. Based on such information, it seems to be possible for an agent to decide to leave the country prior to the date the warrant will be issued, thus avoiding arrest. In other words, it seems that limited foreknowledge could aid an agent in deciding how to act toward the future.

Hunt maintains that such a scenario eludes the Metaphysical Principle. A pivotal difference between this imagined circumstance and ones like the Larry–Lucy scenario above is the following. In the Larry–Lucy case, the set of events over which the agent (God) is attempting to exercise control is exactly the same set of events that the agent already foreknows will happen. This puts the agent in the seemingly impossible position of deciding to bring about an event that in turn has helped bring about the agent's decision (the Metaphysical Problem). But, according to Hunt, this difficulty vanishes in the example of the limited foreknower, for the agent uses information about one future event to decide what to do about some other future event. The limited foreknowing agent (in our example above) is not deciding to bring about an event that in turn has helped bring about that agent's decision. Rather, the limited foreknowing agent is deciding to bring about a future action in light of an awareness of some other future action. Consequently, no impossible circle of dependence eventuates.

With these insights in mind, Hunt next bids us to consider the case of an agent with complete knowledge of the future. According to Hunt, the same reasoning that salvages the providential utility of limited foreknowledge from the

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Metaphysical Problem also redeems the providential usefulness of exhaustive foreknowledge from that same dilemma. Hunt contends that the Metaphysical Principle concerns how foreknowledge is used rather than how much foreknowledge is possessed. Subsequently, as long as the exhaustive foreknower does not use her foreknowledge in a way that brings about impossible dependency loops, the amount of information foreknown by her is irrelevant. In other words, as long as the agent does not attempt to use knowledge of the actual event over which she is attempting to exercise control and instead uses knowledge of events surrounding it, the Metaphysical Principle is not violated.[6]

The counterfactual Metaphysical Problem

Hunt's argumentation is insightful – however, a problem arises for his account. Specifically, Hunt's defence against the Metaphysical Principle seems to allow that even though a causal/dependency loop does not happen, such a loop could occur. And the critic may question whether such a counterfactual situation is possible. Consider the following reconstruction of the Larry–Lucy scenario. Suppose that instead of advising Larry to marry Lucy because of a divine pre-cognizance of that couple's future wedding and happiness, God advises Larry to wed Lucy because the deity foresees that Larry's other potential bride, Linda, will one day fall in love with Lucas. Since this would not fare well for a long-term Larry–Linda marital relationship, God urges Larry to marry Lucy instead. Again, being a devout chap, Larry accedes to the divine counsel and marries Lucy. All of this seems to square well with Hunt's defence against the Metaphysical Problem.

Notice, however, that in such a situation God's act of advising Larry could causally influence Linda's choice of Lucas. For example, Linda might learn of the divine advice given to Larry and subsequently decide that there is no use in hoping for future nuptials with Larry. In turn, Linda might decide to fix her gaze on a new potential hubby, Lucas. Or another example: having become aware of Larry's cold shoulder toward her and of his growing interest in Lucy (each the result of Larry heeding the divine advice), Linda could become persuaded that her best option is to pursue greener pastures with Lucas. In each case, God's advice could contribute to a chain of events that causally impacts Linda's decision to 'fall in love' with Lucas. But this seems to be incompatible with the original assertion that God's advice was grounded in an awareness of Linda's future love for Lucas. That is, such a scenario seems to imply the possibility of a (presumably impossible) causal/dependency loop. If such situations were to unfold, God's advice would be causally influenced by a future event which, in turn, is causally influenced by the divine advice.

These potential circumstances appear to run aground upon the shores of the Metaphysical Principle. That principle implies not only that there can be no

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actual world in which God's prior actions are causally dependent on a future event that in turn is causally dependent upon God's prior action. It also entails the more general maxim that there is no possible world in which God's prior actions are causally dependent on a future event that in turn is causally dependent upon God's prior action. Something must be amiss in Hunt's account, then, if indeed it implies that such causal loops could occur.

Possible replies

At least three counter-replies might be offered in Hunt's behalf. Unfortunately, I believe that none of these rejoinders yields satisfactory results.

Necessary physical causal disconnection

First, one might contend (in Hunt's defence) that perhaps the deity only advises based on foreknown events whose occurrence in no way can be influenced by that divine advice. In this case, no causal loop would unfold and the Metaphysical Problem would be avoided. For example, suppose that the foreknown events are sufficiently distant in space-time from God's earlier advisory actions to make causal connections between them physically impossible. Such physical impossibilities are recognized in contemporary physics, when two events are at space-time coordinates that are temporally-spatially farther from one another than can be travelled by light (which moves at the same speed in all inertial frames of reference). If this type of a necessary physical causal disconnection were to obtain, no causal/dependency loop would or even could develop.

Unhappily, such physically impossible causal connections would not help divine guidance as we have (and Hunt has) construed it, since, *per* hypothesis, such counsel involves the causal convergence of the divinely foreknown conditions with the possible future actions of the advisee. If the foreknown conditions and the advisee's possible future actions causally converge, then in principle God's prior advice also could causally converge with the foreknown conditions. For example, consider the scenario of God foreknowing that a warrant will be issued and using that information to inform someone to flee the country to avoid a possible future arrest. Clearly, the issuance of the warrant and the possible future arrest of the advisee causally converge. It is because the future warrant threatens to produce (partially cause) a future arrest that God warns the advisee to flee the country. In turn, notice that a possible causal chain links God's prior advice to the possible future arrest of the advisee. If the advisee refuses to heed God's recommendation to leave the country, then that individual could be arrested. But since God's prior advice could converge causally with the unwanted possible future arrest, and since that unwanted possible future arrest could converge causally with the future issuance of the warrant, it follows that God's prior

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advice also could causally converge with the issuance of the warrant.[7] Consequently, if God's advice is grounded in a future event that is not influenced causally by His earlier advice, it cannot be because such influence physically is impossible.

But what then keeps these future conditions from being influenced causally by God's earlier advice? The answer appears to be that the causal disconnection between God's advice and those future events merely is contingent. In principle, the two sets of events could be connected causally. In other words, the foreknown future events happen to be unaffected causally by the divine advice, but in principle they physically could be affected. For example, even if Linda's decision to love Lucas were disconnected causally from God's earlier advice to Larry, this would be a matter of coincidence. In principle, her decision could be causally affected by the earlier divine advice. And herein lies the problem. For, as argued above, the Metaphysical Principle makes even these counterfactual causal loops impossible. I conclude that appeal to necessary physical causal disconnection will not aid Hunt's case.

Foreknown causal disconnection

A second response in Hunt's behalf might be the following. Perhaps God only uses knowledge of those future events which, while they could be affected by divine prior providential action, certainly will not be so affected. Suppose that in exhaustively knowing the future, the deity is able to perceive those future events that could be affected by prior divine providential actions, but which in fact certainly will not be. In this case, since it is known that these events in fact will not be affected by God's prior actions, no causal loop emerges when the deity uses knowledge of them to exercise providential control over other future events. In other words, since it is known that these future happenings in fact will not be affected by God's prior actions, then in a certain sense there is no danger, no 'actual' possibility for a causal loop to eventuate. This reply seems to be congruent with Hunt's position. In a later essay, he claims that it is irrelevant to his argument whether scenarios can be imagined where causal/dependency loops could unfold. Rather, so long as such loops in fact do not emerge, his defence against the Metaphysical Problem works.[8]

Ambiguities materialize for this second pro-Huntian response. The argument can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, it can be understood to mean that since, in fact, God's prior action will not affect the foreknown event, then no causal loop in fact will emerge. Consequently, somehow, the Metaphysical Problem is avoided. Second, it could mean that since in fact God's prior actions necessarily will not affect the foreknown event, then no causal loop could emerge. Again, the alleged conclusion would be that the Metaphysical Problem is escaped. Unfortunately, neither of these interpretations avoids the Metaphysical Problem.

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First interpretation To see this, let us formally construct the first interpretation of this argument. It runs something like this:

(1) Necessarily, if God infallibly believes that prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E, then the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(2) God infallibly believes that prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(3) Therefore, the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(4) Necessarily, if the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E, then it is not the case that (a) God's decision to enact prior divine action A causally depends on the future event E and (b) the prior divine action A will causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(5) Therefore, it is not the case that (a) God's decision to enact prior divine action A causally depends on the future event E and (b) the prior divine action A will causally impact the foreknown future event E.

Proposition (1) is an implication of the relationship that holds between the content of an infallible belief and the proposition that that belief references. Proposition (2) is grounded in the hypothesis that God holds an infallible belief about some future event, such that it is believed that the event E will not be causally impacted by a specific prior divine action A. Claim (3) is a logical inference of (1) and (2) *per modus ponens*. Claim (4) rests on the logical equivalence of the proposition 'the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E', and the claim that 'it is not the case that the prior divine action A will causally impact the foreknown future event E'. In turn, proposition (4) recognizes that if the antecedent of a claim is a negation of one conjunct of the conjunctive claim of the consequent, then the whole conjunctive claim of the consequent will be false. Propositions (4) and (3) together imply by *modus ponens* that (5) – namely, the following conjunction is not true: '(a) God's decision to enact prior divine action A causally depends on the future event E and (b) the prior divine action A will causally impact the foreknown future event E.' Proposition (5) formally states the conclusion that a causal loop will not happen.

The primary problem with this first interpretation of our second pro-Huntian response is that it still intimates that God's prior providential actions could causally contribute to the occurrence of the foreknown future events that in turn causally impact God's prior providential actions. But this, obviously, implies that a causal loop could unfold; and again such a possibility runs contrary to the

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Metaphysical Principle. Reconsider argument (1) through (5) above. Proposition (2) appears to be dealing with a contingent event. It is not necessary that God infallibly believe that some prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E. Presumably, there are possible worlds where God does not believe such a thing. But if (2) is contingent, then it seems reasonable to suppose that (3) also is contingent. Certainly, there is nothing in the premises (1) and (2) that entails the necessity of (3). In turn, if (3) is contingent, then also it will be permissible to assume that (5) is contingent. But to say that (5) is contingent is equivalent to claiming that it is merely a contingent fact that a causal loop will not occur. Or in other words, in principle a causal loop could emerge. But this runs counter to the Metaphysical Principle.[9]

Second interpretation Now, our second pro-Huntian response might be salvaged if one could show that proposition (2) above is not contingent, but rather necessary. In this case, it also would follow that both claim (3) and claim (5) are necessary. Essentially, this is what the second interpretation of our second pro-Huntian response is asserting. The argument would then read as follows:

(1) Necessarily, if God infallibly believes that prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E, then the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(2*) Necessarily, God infallibly believes that prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(3*) Therefore, necessarily the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(4) Necessarily, if the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E, then it is not the case that (a) God's decision to enact prior divine action A causally depends on the future event E and (b) the prior divine action A will causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(5*) Therefore, necessarily it is not the case that (a) God's decision to enact prior divine action A causally depends on the future event E and (b) the prior divine action A will causally impact the foreknown future event E.

Proposition (5*) is equivalent to saying that it is impossible for this specific causal loop to occur, and this is congruent with the Metaphysical Principle.

But what type of necessity might necessitate proposition (2*)? Again, (2*) does not appear to be absolutely necessary. In turn, in many situations it would not be the case that (2*) is necessitated by some physical impossibility. But what type of necessity might apply to proposition (2*)? The strongest candidate appears to be 'accidental necessity'. This is the necessity that attaches to an event while it is happening or once it has happened. Presumably, then, if in the past God infallibly believed that 'prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future

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event E', then God's belief is now accidentally necessary. In this case, (2*) would read:

(2**) Accidentally necessarily, God infallibly believed that prior divine action A will not casually impact the foreknown event E.

In turn, if (2*) is accidentally necessary, then arguably (3*) and (5*) are accidentally necessary as well. The end result would be that it is necessary that a causal loop not happen.

Argument (1)–(2*)–(3*)–(4)–(5*) is controversial. The astute reader perhaps will recognize that portions of this argument essentially duplicate an argument often used to allege that foreknowledge and libertarian freedom are incompatible.[10] In turn, the reader might also note that various counter-replies offered against the incompatibility argument could serve as responses to argument (1)–(2*)–(3*)–(4)–(5*). For example, not all would agree that God's beliefs are in the past, maintaining rather that the deity is timeless and only holds beliefs in a timeless eternity.[11] Other critics have contended that even if the deity's belief about some future event is now in the past, it need not follow that God's belief is now accidentally necessary.[12]

But even if argument (1)–(2*)–(3*)–(4)–(5*) can be shielded from the blows of such counter-replies, our second pro-Huntian response may not be saved from the logic of the Metaphysical Principle. To see this, it will be helpful to speculate over the ontological status of the events described in argument (1)–(2*)–(3*). What is the causal story behind these events? Why is it accidentally necessary that 'prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E?' Two principal explanations come to mind. First, the future somehow is actual and, because of this, the future *per se* is accidentally necessary.[13] Given this causal story, an argument like (1)–(2*)–(3*) may be understood simply to reflect a logical, but not a causal, relationship between God's infallible past beliefs and the future about which the deity believes. In a certain sense, God is able to hold an accidentally necessary infallible belief about the future precisely because the future *per se* is accidentally necessary. God's past beliefs do not cause the future to be accidentally necessary; rather, God's infallible past beliefs about the future reflect the fact that the future somehow already is.[14]

Hunt does not explicitly endorse the intrinsic accidental necessity of the future. Nevertheless, such a doctrine may well suit his position. It is doubtful, however, that such an appeal to the 'intrinsic' accidental necessity of the future is helpful to the Huntian case. This is so because such an appeal still falls foul of the Metaphysical Principle. To claim that an event is accidentally necessary is to assert that the event is contingently necessary. The event is necessary only upon the contingent occurrence of the event. But if the obtaining of the event is a contingency, then its non-occurrence is possible. And if its non-occurrence is possible, then its non-necessity is possible. In other words, there are possible worlds where

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such an event does not occur and, thus, is not accidentally necessary. The end result is that it remains a mere contingency that God's prior action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E. There are possible worlds where God's prior action A will impact the foreknown future event E, and according to the Metaphysical Principle, such a counterfactual loop is impossible.

All of this leads to a second possible causal story for explaining why it is accidentally necessary that 'prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E'. Perhaps, somehow, the fact that God has a past (and thus accidentally necessary) infallible belief about some future event causes that future event to be accidentally necessary. That is, perhaps God's infallible past belief that 'prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E' causes it to be the case that it is accidentally necessary that 'prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E'. Here argument (1)–(2*)–(3*) is understood not only to be saying that a logical implication of (1) and (2*) is (3*), but also that somehow (1) and especially (2*) cause (3*) to be the case, including the accidental necessity of (3*). Admittedly, such a causal explanation is not terribly plausible. Still for the sake of argument let us consider it.

Even if the states of affairs described in (1) and (2*) somehow cause (3*), argument (1)–(2*)–(3*) appears to violate the Metaphysical Principle. First, it is not clear that such a state of affairs escapes the dilemma described in the previous paragraph. Arguably, it remains true that the accidental necessity of God's prior action A not impacting future event E is a contingent affair and, thus, that in principle God's prior action A could impact future event E. But perhaps this is not quite the case. Let us speculate that somehow (*per* our second causal explanation) because propositions (1) and (2*) cause (3*) to be accidentally necessarily true, then it really is the case that God's prior action A could not affect future event E. We might imagine that such a state of affairs is a rather unusual but nevertheless stringent form of causal necessity.

Even if this were the case, it is doubtful that such a state of affairs avoids the Metaphysical Problem. This is the case because the events described in (2*), in turn, seem to be causally dependent upon the events described in (3*). Hunt appears to affirm something like the following reasoning:[15]

(8) If the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E, then God infallibly believes that the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(3) The prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.
(2) Therefore, God infallibly believes that the prior divine action A will not causally impact the foreknown future event E.

To all of this is added the assertion that the divine act of believing – which is referenced in (2) – is in the past, and so (2) is now accidentally necessary. But

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notice that an intriguing dependency loop has emerged between argument (8)–(3)–(2) and argument (1)–(2*)–(3*) (at least when the latter is interpreted as asserting a causal dependency). Proposition (2) causally depends upon the truth of claim (3), while claim (3*) causally depends upon claim (2*). In other words, God's infallible belief that a given divine providential action will not affect some foreknown future event depends upon the contingent fact that those divine actions will not affect the foreknown future events. But equally, the alleged necessity of God's prior action not impacting those foreknown events appears to be grounded in the supposed accidental necessity of God's infallible belief. But this appears to be a causal dependency loop.

Now, all of this implies that argument (1)–(2*)–(3*) (interpreted causally), when combined with Hunt's underlying acceptance of argument (8)–(3)–(2), violates the Metaphysical Principle. It assumes not only that a dependency loop is possible, but also that one has occurred. In turn, this truncates the soundness of the second pro-Huntian response. The second pro-Huntian response attempts to overcome the charge that Hunt's apology against the Metaphysical Problem violates the Metaphysical Principle. But one cannot hope to overcome such a charge by using arguments like (1)–(2*)–(3*) and (8)–(3)–(2) which together imply a breach of the Metaphysical Principle. I conclude that our second pro-Huntian response fails.

Denial of the Metaphysical Principle

But perhaps Hunt's position can be rescued by a third potential response. Suppose that the Metaphysical Principle is false, that in fact it is possible for a decision to depend on a belief about an event that depends on the original decision. If this were the case, then there would be no contradiction in claiming that God acts, based on knowledge of a future event that potentially could be affected by God's original act. Indeed, there would be no contradiction in claiming that God acts, based on knowledge of a future event that actually is affected by the deity's original act.

Hunt does not contend that the Metaphysical Principle is false; however, he does suggest that such an assertion may be defensible. Specifically, he cites as a potentially viable posture David Lewis's defence of the logical possibility of causal loops.[16] Lewis contends that, in the context of imaginary time-travel stories, it is possible to imagine a situation wherein a person's older self might inform his younger self about some vital information for building a time machine. In this case, the ensuing causal relationship might emerge:

> His older self knew how [to build the time-machine] because his younger self had been told and the information had been preserved by the causal processes that constitute recording, storage, and retrieval of memory traces. His younger self knew, after the conversation, because his older self had known and the information had been preserved by the causal processes that constitute telling.[17]

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According to Lewis, such a scenario is causally possible, even though it ultimately could not be explained. It is causally possible because 'each event on the loop has a causal explanation, being caused by events elsewhere on the loop'.[18] Nevertheless, the loop as a whole is inexplicable, and may ultimately have no assignable cause. Lewis admits that all of this would be strange, but he maintains that it is 'not impossible, and not too different from inexplicabilities we are already inured to'.[19] For example, 'almost everyone agrees that God, or the Big Bang, or the entire infinite past of the universe, or the decay of a tritium atom, is uncaused and inexplicable. Then if these are possible, why not also the inexplicable causal loops that arise in time travel?'[20]

If Lewis is correct, then the Metaphysical Principle is false. It would be possible for God's prior decision to advise Larry to marry Lucy to depend upon Larry's future wedding with Lucy, even though Larry's wedding also depends upon God's prior decision to advise. In turn, the following counterfactual would be possible, namely, for God's prior decision to advise Larry to depend upon Linda's choice of Lucas even though Linda's choice of Lucas potentially could depend upon God's prior decision to advise Larry.

Vicissitudes emerge for this denial of the Metaphysical Principle. Perhaps the most disturbing hardship is that such a denial implies that there is a series of events (as a whole) over which God cannot exercise providential control. At the risk of over-simplifying, we may observe that providential control may be active or passive. On the one hand, the deity may actively control events by directly bringing them about. For example, God may advise Larry about the future. That is, God may act so as directly to bring about Larry's becoming aware of the divine advice. On the other hand, the deity also may passively control events by permitting their occurrence. For example, God may allow a set of causally related creaturely events to unfold.

But to say, as Lewis does, that there is a series of events as a whole that is causally inexplicable entails that such a series as a whole is divinely causally inexplicable. That is, God does not actively bring about nor passively allow the series as a whole. Its emergence has no causal explanation, including divine. Granted, God operates control within the series. At some earlier time, the deity actively decides how to act in the face of knowledge of some future event. At later times, God permissively grants the occurrence of a chain of events leading up to a future event in question, including the event itself. God controls or can control every event within the circular causal chain. But God does not control the advent of the chain as a whole. No explanation or cause can be assigned to the emergence of this circular sequence. In other words, no action of God explains, causes or permits the series as a whole.

All of this suggests that such causal loops (as a whole) are a kind of brute fact that is not subject to divine active or permissive control. God neither causes nor allows them to eventuate. They simply, inexplicably, happen. Admittedly, in

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theologies that allow for creaturely libertarian freedom, numerous events are thought to eventuate that the deity does not directly cause to happen. For example, God may not directly bring about the deterioration of an atom or (more importantly) cause the choice of an agent with genuine freedom. But for these theologies, it often is assumed that God has permissive control over such events. The deity could keep these happenings from happening. Unfortunately, this is not the case for inexplicable circular causal chains. They are not subject to the divine permissive control. And this may prove to be worrisome for traditional theists (including many who affirm creaturely libertarian freedom).

For example, such circumstances seem to run counter to the idea of divine sovereignty that is insinuated by Richard Swinburne when he notes that God is a being 'who either Himself brings about or makes or permits other beings to bring about (or permits to exist uncaused) the existence of all logically contingent things that exist (i.e. have existed, exist, or will exist)'.[21] Or again, Hunt proclaims as a common theistic commitment that 'God has the ability to control everything', even though the deity often 'freely refrains from exercising that ability (for familiar reasons)'.[22] Such declarations imply that any contingent set of affairs is subject to the divine permissive will. But if inexplicable causal loops obtain, they are not subject to such divine permission. A contradiction, then, emerges between the denial of the Metaphysical Principle and traditional theistic conceptualizations of God's sovereign permissive control. Unless clear reasons can be offered for rejecting this traditional theistic commitment, or for believing that my reasoning above is fallacious, it appears that theists (like Hunt) who endorse the traditional understanding of divine permissive sovereignty must also affirm the Metaphysical Principle.

I conclude that rejection of the Metaphysical Principle is not a viable option; subsequently, the third pro-Huntian response also falters. In turn, in light of the failure of our three pro-Huntian responses, I offer the fuller conclusion that Hunt's apology against the Metaphysical Problem is inadequate. His position insinuates that even though causal loops do not happen, they could happen. And this perspective, itself, is a violation of the Metaphysical Principle.

Notes

1. David P. Hunt 'Divine providence and simple foreknowledge', *Faith and Philosophy*, **10** (1993), 394–414.
2. *Ibid*., 396.
3. *Ibid*., 398.
4. *Ibid*. Hunt is somewhat vague in his description of the kind of dependency at issue in the Metaphysical Principle. However, he appears to have in mind some sort of causal dependency (broadly interpreted), as opposed to say mere logical or definitional implications. He asserts that foreknowledge is analogous to ordinary vision, where a person's knowledge of an object depends on the existence of the object and he speaks of foreknowledge as helping to 'bring about the very future that [one] foreknows'. I will assume, apparently with Hunt, that the kind of dependence at issue is some sort of causal dependence and that such a notion is sufficiently common/clear to allow for the discussion that occurs in this essay.

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5. *Ibid.*, 400. See also, William Hasker *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca NY & London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 57–59; and Tomis Kapitan 'Can God make up His mind?' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, **15** (1984), 37–47.
6. *Ibid.*, 405.
7. In general we might note that necessary physical causal disconnections between earlier and later events on the surface of our planet only occur when the later events are a few milliseconds later than the earlier ones. This is the case because the speed of light is so fast relative to the circumference of the earth that only events that are virtually simultaneous (in the earth's inertial frame of reference) are necessarily physically causally disconnected from one another.
8. David P. Hunt 'The simple-foreknowledge view', in James K. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy (eds) *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 99.
9. Of course, the pro-Huntian could argue that (3) and especially (5) are necessary, even though premises (1) and (2) do not necessitate such a state of affairs. In other words, while premises (1) and (2) are compatible with the contingency of (3) and (5), they do not require that (3) and (5) be contingent. But such a manoeuvre would be unduly arbitrary at this point. Our imaginary pro-Huntian is attempting to establish, by appeal to divine foreknowledge, that (5) is necessary and, subsequently, that casual loops are impossible. Argument (1)–(5) does not demonstrate this.
10. Propositions (1), (2*), and (3*) resemble the first move in the foreknowledge–free will incompatibility argument as developed by, among others, Jonathan Edwards. See Jonathan Edwards *Freedom of the Will*, in Paul Ramsey (ed.) *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 257–258.
11. Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy*, book 5, prose 3, The Loeb Classical Library, tr. I. T., revd H. F. Stewart (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1918).
12. William of Ockham *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Continents*, Marilyn McCord Adams & Norman Kretzmann (tr.), 2nd edn (Indianapolis IN: Hacket, 1983).
13. For a view something like this see Paul Fitzgerald 'The truth about tomorrow's sea fight', *The Journal of Philosophy*, **66** (1969), 307–329, and Hilary Putnam, 'Time and physical geometry', *The Journal of Philosophy*, **64** (1967), 240–247.
14. It is important to notice that this interpretation of the future does not assert that future events are causally determined by prior events. It only asserts that whatever the causes of future events, the future in some sense already is; consequently, it is accidentally necessary.
15. As pointed out above, in n. 4 above, Hunt asserts that divine foreknowledge depends on, or is explained by, the event that is foreknown.
16. Hunt 'Divine providence and simple foreknowledge', 407.
17. David Lewis 'The paradoxes of time travel', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, **13** (1976), 145–152, 149.
18. *Ibid*., 148. It should be noted that Lewis also assumes here the possibility of backward causation – causation from the future to the past. While such a notion certainly is disputable, we will not challenge it here since it appears to be an underlying assumption of the idea of simple foreknowledge itself.
19. *Ibid*., 149.
20. *Ibid*.
21. Richard Swinburne *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, revd 1993, repr. 1995), 134.
22. Hunt 'The simple-foreknowledge view', 69.

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