BELIEF, KNOWLEDGE, AND OMNISCIENCE

Paul WEINGARTNER, *Omniscience. From a Logical Point of View.*
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*General observations*

In this book Paul Weingartner investigates what it means that God is omniscient and defends the coherence of this claim as he understands it. For this he relies on translating claims and arguments into the symbols of predicate logic. The structure of the book follows Thomas Aquinas’s example: each chapter has a question as heading, then arguments for one answer are reported, then arguments for the other answer, then the author defends his own view. Although I found that some of the questions posed have an obvious answer and that Weingartner sometimes adds excursuses which are not necessary for answering the question, this yields a clear line of thought and makes the book reader-friendly. Also with respect to the content the book follows Thomas Aquinas. In particular, it assumes that God is outside of time and that God has infallible foreknowledge of all future events, including free actions. But unlike some Thomist literature, it is not dependent on Aquinas’s terminology and ontology, and is thus accessible also to non-Thomists. The book has some limited exchange with the vast contemporary literature about omniscience and with the contemporary philosophy of religion, but one may desire more.

That Weingartner wrote this book in English, although his mother-tongue is German, has the advantage that it increases the possible readership of the book, but a disadvantage is that the book is stylistically not as good as it would be in German. There are quite a few mistakes1, some of which are consistently

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1. Some examples of faulty sentences: ‘Concerning terminology a singular truth is …’ (67); ‘Jones acts at t that p’ (64); ‘There would be complete agreement under scientists that …’; ‘The main question is whether the antecedent is contradictory and then the premise would be true, but logically true or trivially true.’ (64)
Belief and knowledge

The book does not begin with an explication of what is meant by ‘There is a God’, but starts directly with the question whether everything that God knows is true. Weingartner expresses this in symbols as

\[ gKp \rightarrow p \]

Thus Weingartner assumes that the arrow correctly expresses here the link between divine knowledge and truth which is described by ‘Everything that God knows is true’, even without modal operator and even without universal quantifier. As it stands, the formula only means that it is not the case that ‘\(gKp\)’ as well as ‘\(\neg p\)’ are true. Weingartner adds that the ‘question can also be expressed by asking whether God is infallible’. The same question? That God is infallible implies (a) that he has only true beliefs, and furthermore (b) that it is impossible that he has false beliefs. But ‘Everything that God knows is true’ does not even entail (a), because even if God had many false beliefs it would be true that everything he knows is true. It is even true that everything I know is true, although I have many false beliefs. The claim that Weingartner wants to defend is that God cannot have false beliefs. This claim is easily granted because it is part of the usual concept of God. But his arguments support only the analytic claim (KT) ‘If person \(a\) knows that \(p\), then \(p\) is true’ and thus the claim that everything that God knows is true.

Weingartner seems to think that ‘knowledge’ implies a high degree of certainty or even infallibility. He assumes that if KT is true, then: if person \(a\) knows that \(p\), then \(a\) is certain (or believes infallibly) that \(p\). Weingartner calls a concept of knowledge which is compatible with (KT) a ‘strong’ concept of knowledge (4), and then says that if such a strong concept of knowledge is applicable to