

Foreknowledge and Freedom*

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The bulk of my essay “Truth and Freedom” opposes fatalism, which is the claim that if there is a true proposition to the effect that an action *A* will occur, then *A* will not be free. But that essay also offers a new way to reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom. John Martin Fischer and Patrick Todd (2011) raise a number of objections to “Truth and Freedom,” most of which are objections to its treatment of foreknowledge. Their central complaint seems to be that that treatment is, despite my claims to the contrary, merely a form of Ockhamism—and a poorly developed form of Ockhamism at that.

In this essay I shall reply to Fischer and Todd’s specific objections. But, more importantly, I shall further clarify the fundamental differences between my way of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human freedom and the Ockhamist’s way. In particular, I shall further demonstrate that when it comes to divine foreknowledge’s compatibility with human freedom, the fundamental question is not the Ockhamist’s question of whether God’s beliefs about what an agent will do in the future are “hard facts.” Rather, the fundamental question is whether God’s beliefs about what an agent will do in the future depend on what that agent will do in the future.

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I.

Fischer and Todd charge me with falsely claiming that a certain argument involving foreknowledge begs the question. My response to that charge—along with almost everything else that follows in this essay—requires us to be familiar with the central arguments examined in “Truth and Freedom.” So in this section I shall lay out those arguments, and then respond to that charge.

Suppose (throughout this essay) that time t is in the near future. Now consider *the Parody of the Main Argument*, which concerns a proposition that will be true a thousand years in the future:

(1*) Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* will be true a thousand years from now.

(2*) Necessarily, if *that Jones sits at t* will be true a thousand years from now, then Jones sits at time t .

Therefore,

(3) Jones has no choice about: Jones’s sitting at time t .

In “Truth and Freedom,” I argue that (1*) presupposes (3), and does so in such a way as to make the Parody a bad argument (pp. 35-37; unless otherwise noted, all page references are to “Truth and Freedom”). So the Parody is a bad argument at least partly because of the way in which one of its premises presupposes its conclusion. So let us say that the Parody is “question-begging.”

The Main Argument is the central argument for fatalism considered in “Truth and Freedom.” The Main Argument concerns a proposition that was true a thousand years ago. Here is that argument:

- (1) Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.
- (2) Necessarily, if *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago, then Jones sits at time *t*.

Therefore,

- (3) Jones has no choice about: Jones’s sitting at time *t*.

“Truth and Freedom” argues that that the Main Argument fails at least partly because (1) presupposes (3) in just the way that the Parody’s (1*) presupposes (3) (pp. 37-38). Thus the Main Argument is question-begging in just the way that the Parody is question-begging.

“Truth and Freedom” also considers a descendent of the Main Argument that has the following additional premise:

- (0) The past is appropriately necessary; and, necessarily, if the past is appropriately necessary, then no one now has a choice about what the past was like, not even about which propositions were true in the past.

Because (0) implies (1), here is what I said about this descendent of the Main Argument:

Suppose we recast the Main Argument so that it starts with (0), rather than with (1). Then (1) is not an assumption with which that argument begins, but rather an intermediary conclusion. So (1) is not really a premise of the argument. So (1)’s presupposing the Main Argument’s conclusion does not render the Main Argument question-begging. (p. 44)

So I insisted that the recast Main Argument, which starts with (0), is not question-begging.

Consider the Divine Foreknowledge Argument:

(6) Jones has no choice about: God believed *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years ago.

(7) Necessarily, if God believed *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years ago, then Jones sits at time *t*.

Therefore,

(3) Jones has no choice about: Jones's sitting at time *t*.

“Truth and Freedom” argues that the Divine Foreknowledge Argument fails at least partly because (6) presupposes (3) in the way that both (1) and (1*) presuppose (3) (pp. 52-54). So the Divine Foreknowledge Argument begs the question in just the way that, for example, the Parody begs the question.

Fischer and Todd object that the Divine Foreknowledge Argument is not question-begging. But there are two reasons why this way of putting their objection—that is, *their way* of putting their objection—is misleading. First, they do not defend the above Divine Foreknowledge Argument from my charge that it begs the question; in particular, they never deny that (6) presupposes (3) in the way that (1) and (1*) presuppose (3). Second, the argument that they insist does not beg the question—see the next paragraph—is not the argument that I said begs the question, namely, the above Divine Foreknowledge Argument.

The argument that Fischer and Todd insist does not beg the question is a recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument, an argument that has an additional premise. That additional premise is:

(FP) For any action Y , agent S , and time t , S can perform Y at t only if there is a possible world with the same “hard” past up to t as the actual world in which S does Y at t .

Fischer and Todd claim that the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument is not question-begging because (FP) implies (6), and (FP) does not presuppose (3) in the way that each of (1), (1*), and (6) presupposes (3).

I do not discuss the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument in “Truth and Freedom.” (So, obviously, I do not charge that argument with begging the question in “Truth and Freedom.”) But I think that what I say about the recast Main Argument in “Truth and Freedom” should have made it evident that I would say—as I am saying right now—that the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument is not question-begging.

This should have been evident for two reasons. First, (FP) is supposed to articulate the “fixity” of the past—more on this below—which is similar to the “necessity” of the past, endorsed by (0). Second, I claim, in the passage from “Truth and Freedom” quoted above, that the recast Main Argument, which begins with (0), is not question-begging. For these two reasons it should have been evident that I would say:

Suppose we recast the Divine Foreknowledge Argument so that it starts with (FP), rather than with (6). Then (6) is not an assumption with which that argument begins, but rather an intermediary conclusion. So (6) is not really a premise of the argument. So (6)’s presupposing the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument’s conclusion does not render the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument question-begging.

Fischer and Todd are mistaken when they say that I accuse a non-question-begging argument of begging the question. Nevertheless, I think they are right when they say that “the typical approach of the proponent of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument (or similar arguments)” is not simply to start with a premise like (6), but rather to see (6) as following from an earlier premise that endorses (something like) “the fixity of the past” (Fischer and Todd, 2011, 100). Thus the versions of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument typically found in the literature are not question-begging. So I shall focus on these non-question-begging arguments in what follows.

II.

Fischer and Todd (2011, 110) rightly say, with respect to attempts to block (either version of) the Divine Foreknowledge Argument: “it is not enough that the fact that God has a certain belief about the future *in some sense* depends on the future. This fact must depend on the future *in the right way*.” They then discuss one account of (something along the lines of) dependence on the future—their account is labeled “(BC)” —that turns out to be unhelpful in blocking the Divine Foreknowledge Argument. They then summarize the result of this discussion with the following:

The lesson here is that any proper account of the hard/soft fact distinction must thread the needle between the fact that (in the story) ants moved into Paul’s yard last Saturday and a fact such as that John F. Kennedy was assassinated 46 years prior to our writing this paper. Both facts are facts in virtue of or because of how the future is. Yet only one – the latter – is soft. Thus, we still need a sense in which the JFK fact depends on the future but [the fact that a colony of ants moved into Paul’s yard last Saturday] doesn’t. Both depend

on (or hold because of) the future *somehow*, but only one is soft. Notably, the failure of (BC) would show that one cannot simply invoke the idea that God has the relevant beliefs because of what we do in order to show that these facts do not fall under the fixity of the past (as regimented by (FP)). (2011, 111-112)

The passage just quoted assumes that in order to locate the relevant way in which some of God's beliefs depend on future actions, one must articulate a distinction between hard facts and soft facts that threads a certain needle. That passage assumes this only because it also assumes that the relevant sort of dependence itself somehow turns on the distinction between hard facts and soft facts. But I reject both of those assumptions. For in "Truth and Freedom" I locate the relevant way in which some of God's beliefs depend on future actions, and do so without ever relying on the distinction between hard facts and soft facts.

Fischer and Todd say:

It is, of course, comparatively much easier simply to *say* that God's beliefs depend on our decisions, as does Merricks, without wading into the difficulties surrounding just in what sense God's beliefs so depend, and whether this sense is intuitively relevant to fixity. (2011, 112)

But I do more than simply *say* that (some of) God's beliefs depend on future actions. Instead, and as just noted, I locate the relevant sort of dependence. Moreover, I defend the claim that it is the *relevant* sort of dependence by showing that because some of God's past beliefs depend in this way on an agent's future free actions, that agent thereby

has a choice about God's having had those past beliefs. Fischer and Todd completely ignore—rather than object to—my account of all of this.¹

Let me outline that account. This outline begins with a truism about truth: *that there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens, *that dogs bark* is true because dogs bark, *that there were dinosaurs* is true because there were dinosaurs, *that Jones sits at t* is true because Jones sits at *t*, and so on. In “Truth and Freedom,” I use the expression “truth depends on the world” to assert exactly this truism about truth (pp. 29-31).²

¹ Fischer and Todd also ignore my discussion of “counterfactual power” over the past—this is directly relevant to the story of the ants moving into Paul’s yard last Saturday—and my explicit claim that *having counterfactual power over* is not sufficient for *having a choice about*. See pp. 49-50.

² Fischer and Todd say:

Merricks invokes the truism that truth depends on the world in an attempt to undermine the fatalist arguments. But the fatalist will in no way contest the truism. Rather, he will point out that the truism has to be *properly applied*: if we are to be free, truths about what we do must not only depend on the world, but must depend on the *right part* of the world – a part of the world under our control. But if the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t* was made true by a hard feature of the world a thousand years ago, then whereas this truth depended on the world, it depended on a part of the world outside Jones's control at *t*, namely, how the world was a thousand years prior! (2011, 114)

The only notion of “truth’s dependence on the world” that I invoke in the arguments in “Truth and Freedom” is equivalent to the truism about truth articulated in this reply and on pp. 29-31. And it is clear that the truth of *that Jones sits at t* thus depends on exactly Jones’s sitting at *t*. So it is clear that the truth of *that Jones sits at t* does not thus depend on “a hard feature of the world a thousand years ago.”

Similarly, I say that God's beliefs also depend, in a certain way, on the world. In "Truth and Freedom," I illustrate exactly what I mean by this sort of dependence with:

For example, God believes *that there are no white ravens* because there are no white ravens, and not the other way around. And God believed, a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t* because Jones will sit at *t*, and not the other way around. (p. 52)

Because God's beliefs depend on the world in this way, it follows that God's believing, a thousand years ago, that Jones sits at *t* depends—in the sense of dependence just illustrated—on exactly Jones's sitting at *t*.

Suppose I said that you have no choice about whether you will eat lunch at noon tomorrow. And suppose I added that you have no such choice as a result of the following: first, at noon tomorrow, God will believe that you are then eating lunch; and, second, you have no choice about what God will believe at noon tomorrow. You ought to object as follows: you have a choice about whether you will eat lunch at noon tomorrow; whether God will believe, at noon tomorrow, that you are then eating lunch depends—in the way outlined above—on whether you will be eating lunch then; therefore, you have a choice about whether God will believe, at noon tomorrow, that you are eating lunch then.

"Truth and Freedom" argues that examples like your free lunch lead to a general conclusion about choice. This is the conclusion that if an agent has a choice about what God's having a particular belief depends—in the way outlined above—on, then the agent has a choice about God's having that belief. (For defense of this conclusion see pp. 53-54; this defense builds on the defense of the "second corollary" of truth's dependence on the world on pp. 42-43.) We saw above that God's believing, a thousand years ago, that Jones sits at *t* appropriately depends on Jones's sitting at *t*. So "Truth and Freedom"

concludes that Jones has a choice about God's believing, a thousand years ago, that Jones sits at t .

Fischer and Todd say:

God's being in a certain mental state at a time does not exhibit the temporal relationality essential to soft facthood. God's being in such a mental state at a time is a temporally intrinsic, hard feature of that time. That is, it is not relevantly similar to Kennedy's having been shot 46 years prior to our writing this paper. Rather, God's having a certain belief at a time is relevantly similar simply to Kennedy's having been shot. (2011, 103-104)

Fischer and Todd think that if Jones has a choice at t about (some of) what God believed a thousand years ago, then there must be a relevant difference between God's having that belief then and Kennedy's having been shot. I agree. But I disagree with their Ockhamist assumption, implicit in the above passage, that the relevant difference must be that one of those facts or features is *soft* and the other *hard*. Rather, I offer a non-Ockhamist account of the relevant difference.³

Recall that what God believes depends, in a particular way, on the world. God's believing, a thousand years ago, that Jones sits at t depends, in this particular way, on Jones's sitting at t . (And because Jones has a choice about that on which God's having

³ In the above passage Fischer and Todd also say that "God's being in such a mental state" at a time is a *temporally intrinsic* feature of that time, and fails to display the *temporal relationality* "essential to soft facthood." At the end of Section III below, I show that what God believed in the past can appropriately depend on future actions even if God's having a belief in the past is located only at a past time and is constituted by God's then, at that past time, having an intrinsic property.

had that belief thus depends, Jones has a choice about God's having had that belief.) Kennedy's having been shot does not depend, in this same way, on any future free actions. This is my non-Ockhamist account of the relevant difference between God's believing, a thousand years ago, that Jones sits at t and Kennedy's having been shot.

Fischer and Todd ignore the notion of dependence that drives my argument for the conclusion that Jones has a choice about God's believing, a thousand years ago, that Jones sits at t . Moreover, they object that in arguing for that conclusion, I fail to jump through various Ockhamist hoops. And indeed I do fail to jump through those hoops; I do not even try to jump through them; I revel in bypassing them entirely; for I defend a non-Ockhamist argument for that conclusion.⁴

III.

In "Truth and Freedom," I show that Jones has a choice about God's believing, a thousand years ago, that Jones sits at t . (I show this by the reasoning outlined in the previous section; I do not show this in the way that Ockhamists try to show this.) So I shall proceed on the assumption that Jones does have such a choice. And Jones's having such a choice, as we shall see, leads to the conclusion that the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument fails.

⁴ So, obviously, I reject Fischer and Todd's (2011, 109) claim that I would be "better served casting [my] objection to the Divine Foreknowledge Argument" as an objection to the effect that "God's relevant past beliefs *are soft*." See also p. 54 n. 27.

Recall that the first premise of the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument is:

(FP) For any action Y , agent S , and time t , S can perform Y at t only if there is a possible world with the same “hard” past up to t as the actual world in which S does Y at t .

Fischer and Todd’s defense of (FP) begins with this line: “We start with what appears to be a bit of common sense: we have no choice about the past” (2011, 100). But they should not start with this apparent bit of commonsense. For they reject this apparent bit of common sense; that is, they think we have a choice about some aspects of the past. For example, they think that they have a choice about “Kennedy’s assassination having the property of taking place (roughly) 46 years prior to our writing this essay” (2011, 112).⁵

It seems that they should start with something like this: we have no choice about “hard facts” about the past. This starting point fits with other claims they make, and in particular this starting point fits with (FP), which is itself a claim about the “hard past.” But I am dubious about the very distinction between “hard facts” and “soft facts.” As a result, I doubt that any claim about “hard facts” is properly called a “bit of common sense.” So I am suspicious of their support for (FP) right from the start. Thus I am suspicious of their support for the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument right from the start. But I shall set those suspicions aside and move on.

⁵ For what it is worth, my own view is that it is false that 46 years ago there existed the event of Kennedy’s assassination having the property of *taking place 46 years before Fischer and Todd wrote their paper*. Again, I do not believe that there was any such event. So I deny that that event (existed and) was a “soft fact.” (I also deny that it (existed and) was a “hard fact.”) (Cf. pp. 46-47 n. 19)

The original version of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument—the version that I said was question-begging—began with the following:

(6) Jones has no choice about: God believed *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years ago.

As we saw above, the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument does not begin with (6)—and so avoids begging the question—but instead begins with (FP). Fischer and Todd (2011, 103) say that (FP) “state[s] the thesis of the fixity of the past.” Earlier in their paper, they said (2011, 100) that “(6) is an instance of the very plausible general thesis that the past is ‘fixed’.” So perhaps their idea is that (FP) implies (6) because (6) is an instance of (FP).

But a quick look at (FP) alongside (6) shows that (6) is definitely not an *instance* of (FP):

(FP) For any action *Y*, agent *S*, and time *t*, *S* can perform *Y* at *t* only if there is a possible world with the same “hard” past up to *t* as the actual world in which *S* does *Y* at *t*.

(6) Jones has no choice about: God believed *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years ago.

And we can highlight (6)’s failing to be an instance of (FP) by contrasting (6) with the following, which really is an instance of (FP):

(6*) Jones can sit at *t* only if there is a possible world with same “hard” past up to *t* as the actual world in which Jones sits at *t*.

So it is false that (6) is an instance of (FP), and thus it is false that (FP) implies (6) because (6) is an instance of (FP). Elsewhere Fischer and Todd give a different reason for

(FP)'s implying (6) (2011, 103-104); you might think this different reason is compelling. Or you might think that Fischer and Todd should have instead offered a statement of “the fixity of the past” of which (6) is at least arguably an instance, such as:

(FP*) For any agent *S* and event *E*, *S* has no choice about the occurrence of *E* if *E* is part of the “hard” past.

You can take your pick. That is, let the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument begin with (FP) or (FP*), whichever you think does a better job for Fischer and Todd.

I am not sure what exactly a “hard fact” is supposed to be.⁶ But I think that one of the following disjuncts is true: Either God's believing a thousand years ago that Jones sits

⁶ Fischer and Todd try to characterize hard facts, but—as they themselves admit with the *caveat* ‘hard to characterize precisely’—their characterizations are not crystal clear. Nor are the various characterizations that they give—characterizations in terms of *temporal nonrelationality*, *being not genuinely about another time*, and *not depending on what happens in the future*—obviously equivalent. Here are some examples:

“Hard facts are (in some way that is hard to characterize precisely) temporally nonrelational as regards the future (relative to the time they are about).” (2011, 102)

“...a hard fact about some time *t* is genuinely about *t* and not also genuinely about some time after *t*.” (2011, 102)

They mention “the temporal nonrelationality of hard facts, and their attendant lack of dependence on what we now do.” (2011, 105)

“...what makes the difference for the Ockhamist between soft and hard facts about the past is that soft facts ... are (in a particular way) dependent on the future...” (2011, 108)

And Fischer and Todd (2011, 113n.30) say: “For the sake of simplicity, we can think of facts as true propositions (although nothing in our paper or in this part of it depends on this particular construal of facts).” But I think that they are wrong that nothing in their paper depends on that construal of facts. After

at t is a hard fact about the thousand-years-ago past, or it is not the case that God's believing a thousand years ago that Jones sits at t is a hard fact about the thousand-years-ago past. And, I shall now argue, if either disjunct is true, the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument fails. So, since one or the other of those disjuncts is true, we should conclude that the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument fails.⁷

Suppose the second disjunct is true; suppose that it is not the case that God's believing a thousand years ago that Jones sits at t is a hard fact about the thousand-years-ago past. Then neither (FP) nor (FP*) implies (6). Then the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument contains an invalid move—namely, the move to (6) from (FP) or (FP*)—and so fails.

Recall that we are proceeding on the assumption, defended in “Truth and Freedom” as outlined above (§II), that Jones has a choice about God's believing, a

all, if all facts are true propositions, then hard facts are true propositions. And surely much in their paper depends on their construal of hard facts.

Unfortunately, Fischer and Todd do not seem to stick with a construal of facts as true propositions. For they say things like: “The thought here is just this: God's being in a certain mental state at a time does not exhibit the temporal relationality essential to soft facthood. God's being in such a mental state at a time is a temporally intrinsic, hard feature of that time” (2011, 103). This passage seems to suggest that *God's being in a certain mental state* at a time is a hard fact about that time. But *God's being in a certain mental state* would be an event, not a true proposition.

⁷ Here is another option. Because ‘hard fact’ and ‘hard past’ are so poorly defined, no sentence using either ‘hard fact’ or ‘hard past’ expresses a proposition. Then neither of the above disjuncts is true. But then, by the same token, neither (FP) nor (FP*) is true. So the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument fails.

thousand years ago, that Jones sits at t . With this in mind, suppose the first disjunct is true; suppose that God's believing a thousand years ago that Jones sits at t is a hard fact about the thousand-years-ago past; then Jones has a choice about this hard fact about the past. And so (FP) and (FP*), which are intended to preclude anyone's having a choice about a hard fact about the past, are false.⁸ Then the recast Divine Foreknowledge argument has a false first premise and so fails.

Some might object that it is absurd—my arguments in “Truth and Freedom” notwithstanding—to say that Jones has a choice about a hard fact about the past. But this is not absurd. On the contrary, we can make perfectly good sense of this, at least to the extent that we can make sense of the notion of a “hard fact.” In the remainder of this section I shall focus on my preferred way to make sense of this.

As I already said, I am not sure what exactly a “hard fact” is supposed to be. But whatever exactly ‘hard fact’ means, I think that Fischer and Todd would agree that any event that occurs only at a past time, and is constituted by an object's having an *intrinsic* property, is a hard fact about that past time.⁹ At any rate, and for the remainder of this section only, I shall assume that any such event counts as a “hard fact about a past time.”

⁸ That is, (FP) is false if we grant Fischer and Todd their claim that (FP) really does preclude anyone's having a choice about a hard fact about the past. If (FP) does not preclude this, then it does not imply (6), and the recast Divine Foreknowledge Argument, when run with (FP) (as opposed to (FP*)) as its first premise, is invalid.

⁹ Or perhaps they would agree, instead, that a true proposition to the effect that event occurs only at a past time, and is constituted by an object's having an intrinsic property at that past time, is a hard fact about that past time.

Presumably, Fischer and Todd agree that we sometimes have a choice about some event's occurring at a *future* time, even if that event is constituted by an object's having an intrinsic property. Thus, presumably, they agree that we sometimes have a choice about—if I may put it this way—*a hard fact about a future time*. I suppose that this is because they think there is some sort of means by which we can bring about hard facts about future times.

Fischer and Todd deny that we sometimes have a choice about a hard fact about a past time. But they seem to think that if there were backward causation, we would have such a choice. For Fischer and Todd say that backward causation would “call (FP) into question” and that a lack of backward causation is one of the “*prerequisites*, so to speak, of the [hard] past being fixed” (2011, 104-105, including n. 14). I suppose this is because backward causation would be a means by which we could bring about hard facts about past times. Thus they seem to agree that if there were a means by which we could bring about hard facts about past times, we would sometimes have a choice about hard facts about past times.

I think there is a means by which we sometimes bring about God's believing something in the past—even if God's thus believing is constituted by God's having an intrinsic property. And I think this is exactly the same means by which we sometimes bring about God's believing something in the future—again, even if God's thus believing is constituted by God's having an intrinsic property. I describe this means in these final paragraphs of “Truth and Freedom” (pp. 54-55):

But divine foreknowledge does not require backward causation. The first step toward seeing this is to suppose that God believed, a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t* because the proposition *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago. Obviously

enough, this claim—a claim about God’s believing a proposition at the very time at which that proposition was true—does not invoke backward causation. (Indeed, it need not invoke causation of any sort.)

The second and final step is to suppose that, since truth depends on the world, *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago because Jones will sit at *t*. The dependence of truth on the world is not causal [see pp. 41-42]. Thus there is no backward causation implied by the claim that *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago because Jones will sit at *t*.

These two steps deliver a sense of ‘because’ in which God believed, a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t* because Jones will sit at *t*. But they do not rely on backward causation at any point. As a result, they deliver a backward-causation-free sense of ‘because’ in which God believed, a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t* because Jones will sit at *t*.

The Ockhamist tries to reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom by way of the claim that God’s past beliefs about the future are not “hard facts,” or are not “temporally intrinsic.” My way of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human freedom is not Ockhamism. For I reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom by arguing that, because we have a choice about our free actions, we thereby have a choice about (some of) what God believed in the past—regardless of whether God’s past beliefs are “hard facts” or are “temporally intrinsic.” The key to this argument is that God’s beliefs about future human free actions depend on those free actions in the way articulated above.

IV.

In “Truth and Freedom” I give four reasons that my refutation of the Main Argument, and by extension of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument, is not Ockhamism (pp. 46-50). The reason on which I spend the most time has already been emphasized above: my refutation of the Main Argument never relies on a distinction between hard facts and soft facts (or between temporally intrinsic and temporally relational facts), or on the relevance of such a distinction to blocking that argument.¹⁰

Fischer and Todd are particularly opposed to another of those four reasons, described in this passage from “Truth and Freedom,” which they quote:

I object that the Main Argument begs the question. But Ockhamists would not thus object to the Main Argument. For Ockhamists do not invoke the idea underlying this objection, the idea that truth depends on the world. (p. 46)

Fischer and Todd think that this passage shows that I have “fundamentally misunderstood Ockhamism” at “its very heart and soul” (2011, 107). For they say that Ockhamists “do indeed invoke the idea that truth depends on the world” (2011, 108).

¹⁰ Fischer and Todd provide what seems to be an example of a soft fact about the past that no one now has (or will have) a choice about: “For example, it is a soft fact about early this morning that the sun rose 24 hours prior to another sunrise, but presumably no one now has a choice about this fact, since no one can prevent the sun’s rising tomorrow.” So—if they are right about what counts as a soft fact about early this morning—I made a mistake when I said that Ockhamists have to make sense of the distinction between soft facts and hard facts in a way that delivers the result that for each soft fact about the past, someone or other now has (or will have) a choice about it (p. 48). I should have said, instead, that Ockhamists have to make sense of the distinction between soft facts and hard facts, and also have to defend the further claim that (what the Ockhamist claims are) soft facts that are involved in arguments for fatalism, and arguments from divine foreknowledge to a lack of human freedom, are among the subset of soft facts that someone or other now has (or will have) a choice about. All of this makes me even happier not to be an Ockhamist!

They then purport to support their claim that Ockhamists invoke the idea that truth depends on the world with two passages; but neither passage supports that claim.

Here is the first passage, from Ockham himself:

Other propositions are about the present as regards their wording only and are equivalently about the future, since their truth depends on the truth of propositions about the future. (*Predestination...*, Assumption 3 [1983, 46-47])

Ockham here does not even appear to say that truth depends on the world. Instead, he says that the truth of some propositions depends on the truth of other propositions.

Here is the second passage, which is from Alfred Freddoso:

Although, as we shall see, the detailed articulation of this position [Ockhamism] is rather complicated, the intuition which grounds it is the familiar, but often misunderstood, claim that a future-tense proposition is true now *because* the appropriate present-tense proposition or propositions will be true in the future. (1983, 264)

Again, this passage does not even appear to claim that truth depends on the world.

Rather, it claims that, according to the Ockhamist, the truth of a future-tense proposition depends on the future truth of the appropriate present-tense proposition or propositions.

Maybe more digging in the Ockhamist corpus would locate some avowed Ockhamists—or even Ockham himself—saying: “truth depends on the world.” But even this would not show, as Fischer and Todd charge, that “Merricks relies on the same ideas about dependence as those that have been motivating Ockhamists all along” (2011, 112). To show that, one would have to show that the Ockhamists’ notion of truth’s dependence on the world is equivalent to the “truism about truth” (§II).

I do not think you will find any avowed Ockhamists endorsing just this notion of truth’s dependence on the world—the notion that is equivalent to the truism about truth—

and then, with that notion in hand, making the other central moves made in “Truth and Freedom.” But if you do, you should wonder why those Ockhamists brought in all the fancy machinery such as *soft facts and hard facts* and *truths about the present as regards their wording but equivalently about the future* and *facts that are temporally relational as opposed to temporally intrinsic* and so on. For since those Ockhamists are defending the views defended in “Truth and Freedom,” that fancy machinery is unnecessary.

V.

Most of Fischer and Todd’s (2011) objections focus on my treatment of foreknowledge and that treatment’s relation to Ockhamism. I have addressed those objections above. But Fischer and Todd do offer one criticism of my treatment of fatalism. I shall respond to that criticism in this section, in part because doing so reinforces the point that my way of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human freedom does not require God’s beliefs to be “temporally relational.”

Recall this proposition:

(1) Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago. Fischer and Todd suggest a thesis—which they seem to think might be true—that they say implies that “it can be argued that (1) is indeed supported by the fixity of the past” (2011, 114). Their thesis is that because *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago, “there must have been something temporally nonrelational about the world *a thousand years ago* in virtue of which this was true” (2011, 114).

Truthmaker says that, for every true proposition p , there exists an entity x that makes p true. Fischer and Todd think that their thesis will be attractive to defenders of *Truthmaker*. But consider those who—like eternalists about time—think that future times are just as real as the present time. They will say that the proposition *that Jones sits at t* was made true, even a thousand years ago, by the event of Jones’s sitting at t , which has been located at t all along. So they will not take *Truthmaker* to offer any support for Fischer and Todd’s thesis.

Now consider everyone else. That is, now consider those who—like presentists about time—deny that the future is just as real as the present. They might reject *Truthmaker*, thus denying that something had to exist a thousand years ago to make *that Jones sits at t* true then (cf. Merricks, 2007, Ch. 6). Or they might say that since truths do require truthmakers, *that Jones sits at t* was not true a thousand years ago (neither was it false). But either way, their views about *Truthmaker* will not support Fischer and Todd’s thesis.

Fischer and Todd do not tell us how the argument from their thesis to the truth of (1) is supposed to go. Nor do they tell us how their thesis is supposed to undermine my arguments for the falsity of (1) (pp. 39-45). Nor do they really explain their thesis itself; in particular, they do not explain the notion of *true in virtue of*, which is invoked by their thesis.

But suppose they added that if p is *true in virtue of x* at some time, then p is true at that time *only* because of x . Then their thesis would imply that, a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t* was true *only* because of “something temporally nonrelational about the world *a thousand years ago*.” That implication itself implies that the following was

false a thousand years ago: *that Jones sits at t* is true because Jones sits at *t*. So that implication implies that the “truism about truth” (§II) was false a thousand years ago. So perhaps Fischer and Todd think their thesis is inconsistent with the truism about truth.

My arguments in “Truth and Freedom” for the falsity of (1) rely on the truism about truth. So perhaps Fischer and Todd think their thesis undermines those arguments by way of undermining that truism. Of course, if their thesis is inconsistent with the truism about truth, then that truism is inconsistent with their thesis. And the truism about truth definitely is (and was) true. So if forced to choose, we should choose that truism over their thesis. Happily, this does not seem to be a costly choice, not even for defenders of Truthmaker.

On the other hand, suppose that their thesis is not inconsistent with the truism about truth. Then, again, I am not sure how their thesis is supposed to undermine my arguments for the falsity of (1). Suppose—just to illustrate once more that it matters how we understand *true in virtue of*—that *true in virtue of* means exactly: *has its truth necessitated by*. Then their thesis is no threat to my arguments for the falsity of (1). For my arguments for the falsity of (1) are perfectly consistent with the existence, a thousand years ago, of something that necessitates the truth of *that Jones sits at t*. In particular, my arguments for the falsity of (1) are consistent with the existence, a thousand years ago, of the event of God’s believing that Jones sits at *t*. This is so even if God’s thus believing was “something temporally nonrelational about the world *a thousand years ago*.”

VI.

As I said above (§I), I agree with Fischer and Todd that the versions of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument typically defended in the literature start with a premise that endorses “the fixity of the past.” And let us assume, with Fischer and Todd, that that starting premise should be (something like) their (FP), which relies essentially on the idea of the “hard past.” In light of what I have argued above, I conclude that all such versions of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument fail. Note in particular that all such versions fail even if God’s past beliefs about the future are “temporally nonrelational” and are “hard facts” about the past.¹¹

My objections to those versions of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument are rooted in the thesis that God’s beliefs about what an agent will do depend (in a particular way) on what that agent will do. As I said in “Truth and Freedom,” the root of all my objections is Origen’s insight: “...it will not be because God knows that an event will occur that it happens; but, because something is going to take place it is known by God before it happens.”¹²

¹¹ Perhaps, *contra* Fischer and Todd, the idea of the “fixity of the past” has nothing to do “hard facts” or the “hard past.” One option is that the fixity of the past amounts to the past’s being unchangeable; but then the fixity of the past does not imply premise (6) of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument (see pp. 40-41). Another option is that the fixity of the past amounts to the impossibility of backward causation; but then, again, the fixity of the past does not imply (6) (see pp. 41-42 and 54-55). Another option is that the fixity of the past amounts to the claim that no one now has a choice about any aspect of the past, not even about God’s past beliefs; but then the past is not fixed.

¹² *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* Bk. 7, Ch. 8, § 5 [2002, 90]. Molina (*Concordia*, IV, Disputation 52, §19 [1988, 179]) joins Origen in taking God’s beliefs about what will happen to depend on what will happen, rather than the other way around.

I am not sure whether Anselm's nuanced position in *De Concordia* is inconsistent with Origen's insight. But Anselm does say:

Given that we believe that God foreknows or knows all things, it remains for us to consider whether God's knowledge is from things or things have their being from his knowledge. For if God has his knowledge from things, it follows that things are prior to God's knowledge and thus are not from God, since they cannot be from God unless they are from his knowledge. (*De Concordia* 1.7 [2007, 370])

Because he denies that God's knowledge is "from things," perhaps Anselm would deny Origen's insight.¹³ And Anselm aside, presumably some philosophers or theologians claim that God's beliefs do not depend on the world and, as a result, deny Origen's insight. Those deniers will not be moved by my objections to the above versions of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument.

Unmoved by my objections, perhaps those deniers might defend a version of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument of the sort that Fischer and Todd say is typically defended, a version that starts with (and so requires one to make sense of) a claim about the "fixity of the past." But I think that that would be pointless. For those deniers do not

¹³ Aquinas denies that God's beliefs *causally* depend on the world (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I.67.5 [1975, 222] and *Summa Theologica* Ia.q14.a8 [1945, 147-8]). But Aquinas explicitly says that he agrees with Origen that God's beliefs about what will happen depend (in a non-causal way) on what will happen (*ST* Ia.q.14.a8, reply Obj. 1 [1945, 147-8]). (Note that I argue that God's beliefs about what will happen depend in a non-causal way on what will happen; see §III above, and pp. 54-55.) Unlike Aquinas, Anselm never explicitly says whether he agrees with Origen's insight.

need to make sense of the “fixity of the past” in order to articulate and defend a non-question-begging version of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument. This is because they can defend a version that starts with the following:

(0*) God’s past beliefs do not depend on the world; and, necessarily, if God’s past beliefs do not depend on the world, then no mere human being has a choice about what God believed in the past.

If (0*) were true, a version of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument that begins with (0*) would show that none of us acts freely. The key to this is that (0*) entails:

(6) Jones has no choice about: God believed *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years ago.

Those who deny that God’s beliefs depend on the world thereby deny that God’s past beliefs depend on the world; so they endorse (0*). But those who deny that God’s beliefs depend on the world also thereby deny that God’s present and future beliefs depend on the world. So those who deny that God’s beliefs depend on the world should also endorse claims about God’s present and future beliefs that parallel (0*). For example, they should endorse the following:

(0**) God’s future beliefs do not depend on the world; and, necessarily, if God’s future beliefs do not depend on the world, then no mere human being has a choice about what God will believe in the future.

Suppose (0**) is true. Then (0**) is the first premise in an argument that shows that none of us has a choice about any of our actions, and so none of us acts freely. The key to this is that (0**) entails the following:

(6**) Jones has no choice about: God will believe *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years from now.¹⁴

When it comes to the compatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge, the central issue is not whether the past is “fixed.” Nor is the central issue whether this or that aspect of the past is “hard.” Indeed, the central issue has nothing at all to do with the past. The central issue, instead, is whether God’s beliefs depend on the world. And because this is the central issue, it turns out that any threat to human freedom from divine foreknowledge does not turn on divine foreknowledge in particular. For God’s knowledge of present and past human actions threatens human freedom just as much—and in just the same way—as does God’s knowledge of future human actions. But I believe that all these threats can be undermined. This is because I believe that God’s beliefs depend on the world.

¹⁴ Here is the entire argument, which resembles the Parody of the Main Argument (§I) in salient ways:

(0**) God’s future beliefs do not depend on the world; and, necessarily, if God’s future beliefs do not depend on the world, then no mere human being has a choice about what God will believe in the future.

(6**) Jones has no choice about: God will believe *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years from now.

(7*) Necessarily, if God will believe *that Jones sits at t* a thousand years from now, then Jones sits at time *t*.

Therefore,

(3) Jones has no choice about: Jones’s sitting at time *t*.

Because Jones and sitting and *t* are arbitrarily chosen, the argument generalizes.

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