

Truth and Freedom

Trenton Merricks

University of Virginia

I. A Truism

Aristotle says:

If there is a man, the statement whereby we say that there is a man is true, and reciprocally—since if the statement whereby we say that there is a man is true, there is a man. And whereas the true statement is in no way the cause of the actual thing's existence, the actual thing does seem in some way the cause of the statement's being true: it is because the actual thing exists or does not that the statement is called true or false. (*Categories* 14b, 15–22 [1984, 22])

Elsewhere, Aristotle adds:

When is what is called truth or falsity present, and when is it not? We must consider what we mean by these terms. It is not because we think that you are white, that you *are* white, but because you are white we who say this have the truth. (*Metaphysics* 9, 1051b, 5–8 [1984, 1661])

I take Aristotle to be endorsing a general point: a claim or statement or belief or proposition is true because things are how that claim (or statement . . .) represents things as being—and not the other way around. Again, Aristotle tells us that what is true depends on what the world is like—but not vice versa.

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The point that truth depends on the world is not the thesis that, for each truth, there is something in the world to which that truth “corresponds.” Nor is it the thesis that every truth has a “truthmaker.” Nor is it even the thesis that there is a *depends on* relation, or a *because* relation, that holds between each truth and (some part of) the world. For, as certain negative existentials readily show, every one of these theses is more controversial than the point that truth depends on the world.

That there are no white ravens is true. Yet it is a matter of controversy whether there is some entity—such as the state of affairs (or, in other words, the event) of *the universe’s lacking white ravens*—to which that truth corresponds. Likewise, it is controversial whether that truth has a truthmaker.¹ Similarly, it is controversial whether that truth stands in a *depends on* or a *because* relation to some relatum, a relatum like (again) the state of affairs of *the universe’s lacking white ravens*. But even so, it should not be at all controversial that *that there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens. That is, it should not be at all controversial that that truth depends on the world, and in particular on there being no white ravens.²

Or suppose, as “deflationists” would have it, that there is no property of *being true*. Suppose, instead, that *that there are no white ravens’s* being true amounts to nothing more than there being no white ravens. Even so, we should still recognize that, insofar as it is correct to say “*that there are no white ravens* is true,” this is correct because there are no white ravens. And we should still deny that there being no white ravens depends on the truth of *that there are no white ravens*.

Despite the many controversies surrounding truth, it should be uncontroversial that a claim, if true, is true because the world is the way that claim represents the world as being, and not vice versa. Again, it should be uncontroversial that *that there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens, *that dogs bark* is true because dogs bark, *that*

1. Elsewhere (Merricks 2007), I argue against both the correspondence theory of truth and the claim that every truth has a truthmaker.

2. The same point could be made with contingent predications. Consider Fido the brown dog. And consider this uncontroversial claim: *that Fido is brown* is true because Fido is brown. This claim is not the controversial assertion that there is a *because* (or *depends on*) relation holding between two relata. After all, the ‘Fido is brown’ that follows the ‘because’ in this claim does not seem to name an entity, and so does not seem to name a potential relatum. The same goes for the ‘*that Fido is brown* is true’ that occurs before the ‘because’ and, more generally, for every expression of the form ‘*p* is true’.

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there were dinosaurs is true because there were dinosaurs, and so on. Some might complain that this is not only uncontroversial, but also uninteresting. That is, some might complain that the point that truth thus depends on the world is a mere truism. Fair enough. But, as we shall see, this truism about truth undermines a familiar threat to freedom.

II. A Familiar Threat to Freedom

Suppose that Jones, who is sitting, is worried that he is not sitting *freely*. Perhaps Jones suspects that the CIA is conducting an experiment in mind control, involving, among other things, the Agency's causing him to intend to sit. Or, if he is an incompatibilist about freedom and determinism, Jones's worry might come from his suspicion that his sitting is the inevitable result of the laws of nature combined with the state of the distant past.

But whatever Jones ought to think of government conspiracies or determinism, he should not worry that the truth of *that Jones is sitting* keeps his sitting from being free. He should not have this worry even though that truth absolutely necessitates Jones's sitting; that is, even though, necessarily, if (and only if) *that Jones is sitting* is true, then Jones is sitting.

He should not have this worry because everyone, incompatibilists included, should deny that this truth's necessitating Jones's sitting determines his sitting in such a way that his sitting is not free. One reason that everyone should deny this is that such determination would imply a falsehood. It would imply that Jones is sitting because *that Jones is sitting* is true. That false implication is at odds with the point that the way the world is does not depend on what is true, but rather the other way around.

Of course, no one argues that Jones's sitting is not free because of the truth of *that Jones is sitting*. More generally, for all *S* and all *A*, no one sees a threat to *S*'s freely doing *A*—suppose *S* is doing *A* right now—in the current truth of *that S does A*. No one sees a threat here even given that, necessarily, if (and only if) *that S does A* is true, then *S* does *A*. Even so, some have seen a threat to the freedom of some actions in the truth of certain propositions about those actions.

More specifically, and ever since Aristotle and Diodorus Cronus, some have thought that if certain propositions about *future* actions were

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true, those actions would not be free.³ Suppose their idea was that any truth implying the occurrence of a future action would thereby determine that that future action will occur, and moreover that that action's being thus determined rules out its being free. Then we could conclude without further discussion that their idea was mistaken, and we could conclude this no matter what our position on the consistency of free will and determinism. For the idea that truths about the future thus determine the future violates a truth, if not a truism, about truth: truth depends on the world, not the other way around.

But we cannot dismiss arguments for “fatalism” that quickly. To see why not, consider this remark from Jonathan Edwards concerning foreknowledge:

Whether prescience be the thing that *makes* the event necessary or no, it alters not the case. Infallible foreknowledge may *prove* the necessity of the thing foreknown, and yet not be the thing which *causes* the necessity. (*Freedom of the Will*, pt. 2, sec. 12 [1957, 263])

An argument that moves from premises invoking truths about the future to the conclusion that the future is determined, and determined in such a way as to preclude freedom, is not thereby committed to the claim that those truths themselves do that determining. So arguments for fatalism do not automatically violate our truism about truth. Nevertheless, as we shall see, that truism will ultimately undermine the most compelling sort of argument for fatalism.

That truism does not, however, undermine every possible argument for fatalism. But I think that the arguments that it fails to undermine are not particularly compelling to start with. For example, some such arguments seem to conflate what *will happen* with what *must happen*. Consider arguments given by philosophers who correctly note that the truth of *that S will do A* implies that *S will do A*—but then jump, without argument, from that *S will do A* to that *S must do A*. (See, for example, Lukasiewicz 1967, 53; MacFarlane 2003, 325–26; and Ryle 1954, 15.)

Here is another example of an argument for fatalism that is not undermined by our truism, but is unconvincing for other reasons. According to Donald C. Williams (1951, 292) and Susan Haack (1974, 74–81), Aristotle's reasoning in *De Interpretatione* 9 is of the following form: Suppose that it is now true that Jones will sit tomorrow;

3. A bit more on Aristotle below; for discussion of Diodorus, see Bobzien 1998, 102–8.

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necessarily, if it is true that Jones will sit tomorrow, then Jones will sit tomorrow; therefore, necessarily, Jones will sit tomorrow.⁴

If this reasoning were valid, we could conclude that if it is true that Jones will sit tomorrow, then Jones must sit tomorrow. But, while it is a matter of controversy whether Aristotle reasons as Williams and Haack say he does, it is not controversial that such reasoning is invalid. After all, if it were valid, we could easily show that every true claim p was necessarily true, without any recourse to truths about the future: p is true; necessarily, if p is true then p is true; therefore, necessarily p is true.⁵

III. The Main Argument

Let time t be just a few minutes in the future from now, and consider the *Main 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 .

I shall take (3), the conclusion of the Main Argument, to imply that Jones's sitting at t will not be free.⁶

In my opinion, the Main Argument is the strongest argument for fatalism; that is, it is the strongest argument that moves from truths in the past to a present or future lack of freedom. But, as we shall see, the Main Argument fails because of considerations arising from truth's dependence on the world (sec. 4–5). We shall also see that every initially compelling argument for fatalism—that is, every argument for fatalism free of obvious flaws like those noted in the preceding section—fails for the same reason.

4. Aristotle is standardly read as concluding that contingent propositions about the future lack a truth-value; for a nonstandard reading, see Anscombe 1956.

5. Aquinas (1975, 224) points out that this sort of reasoning is invalid in *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.67.10.

6. In the Main Argument, and in the arguments to follow, 'Jones has no choice about' could be exchanged for 'Jones does not have, never had, and never will have a choice about'. This might make it even clearer that the conclusion of these arguments implies a lack of freedom. Indeed, 'Jones has no choice about' could even be exchanged for 'Jones is not free with respect to'.

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The first premise of the Main Argument, (1), asserts both that the proposition *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago and also that Jones has no choice about this proposition's having then been true. Thus (1) entails that a proposition (namely, *that Jones sits at t*) was true a thousand years ago. A. J. Ayer (1963) and Peter van Inwagen (1983, 35) claim that propositions exist "outside time." As a result of existing outside time, so Ayer and van Inwagen argue, propositions are not true at times. So, they would agree, no proposition was true a thousand years ago. So they would say that (1) is false. In fact, Ayer and van Inwagen see the claim that propositions are not true at times as a way to block arguments like the Main Argument.

But I deny that propositions are outside time. Rather, I think that they exist at times, and so are true (or false) at times. After all, it certainly seems that some propositions—for example, *that humans exist*—were true long before I was born, and anything true *before* I was born must exist in time. Moreover, I shall argue that some propositions undergo change in truth-value, and if propositions undergo change of any sort, then propositions exist in time. So let us begin with two claims, which together imply that some propositions undergo change in truth-value.

First, for each way things are, there is a true proposition representing things being that way.⁷ For example, suppose that *O* is *F*. Then there is the proposition *that O is F*. Second, for some *O* and some *F*, *O* goes from being *F* to failing to be *F*. This second claim is not shorthand for the claim that *O* is, all along, *F* at one-time and not-*F* at another-time. Nor is it shorthand for the claim that one temporal part of *O* is always *F* and another temporal part of *O* never was *F* to begin with. Rather, *O* itself goes from simply being *F*, without qualification, to simply lacking that same property, again without qualification (see Merricks 1994; Hinchliff 1996; Crisp 2003).

Some will reject this second claim. And some might reject even the first. Nevertheless, both claims are quite plausible, and I believe that they are both true. Given these two claims, we can conclude that some propositions undergo change in truth-value. For suppose that *O* is *F*.

7. My argument works with weakened versions of this first claim, just so long as they imply that there are propositions like *that O is F*. But taken "full strength," and assuming that there is a way everything is, this first claim implies that there is a true "maximal" proposition. Thus, at least on one understanding of 'possible worlds,' this first claim gets us one possible world (in particular, it gets us the actual world). If for each way everything could be, but is not, there is a proposition representing things being that way, then we get the full panoply of possible worlds.

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Then *that O is F* is true. Suppose that later *O* is no longer *F*. Then *that O is F* is no longer true. Indeed, *O* changes with respect to being *F* if and only if *that O is F* changes with respect to being true.⁸

Entities that exist outside time do not change. So, since *that O is F* changes, *that O is F* does not exist outside time. So *that O is F* exists at times. So *that O is F* is true (or false) at times. Indeed, *that O is F* is true at every time that *O* is *F*; similarly, whenever *O* is not *F*, *that O is F* is not true.

I assume that either all propositions are outside time, or none are. So I conclude that, since *that O is F* exists at times and is true (or false) at times, all propositions exist at times and are true (or false) at times. This includes even those propositions that cannot change in truth-value, propositions like *that O is F at t* and—to return to the Main Argument—*that Jones sits at t*. So I do not endorse Ayer's and van Inwagen's objection to the first premise of the Main Argument, which premise is:

- (1) Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.

Besides, there is an argument involving true beliefs—as opposed to true propositions—that parallels the Main Argument (see sec. 7). Nothing like Ayer's and van Inwagen's objection to (1) can block this parallel argument because, even if propositions are outside time, at least some beliefs exist at, and are true at, times. So even if Ayer's and van Inwagen's objection to (1) is correct, it is a mere stopgap measure.

IV. The Main Argument is Question-Begging . . .

Again, let *t* be just a few minutes in the future from now. Here is the *Parody of the Main Argument*, which focuses on the future truth (as opposed to the past truth) of *that Jones sits at t*:

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

8. The idea that (some) propositions undergo change in truth-value seems to be at least as old as Aristotle: "Suppose, for example, that the statement that somebody is sitting is true; after he has got up this same statement will be false. Similarly with beliefs" (*Categories* 4a, 24–26 [1984, 7]). Moreover, those who endorse (the standard way of understanding) Aristotle's views on future contingents say that *that a sea battle occurs at time t* is neither true nor false before *t*, but from *t* onward is true or, instead, false; this, too, would be a change in truth-value.

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- (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*.

I think that everyone will agree that the Parody fails to present a legitimate threat to Jones's freedom. Again, I think that everyone will agree that the Parody is not a good argument for the conclusion that Jones has no choice about his sitting at time *t*.

Everyone will agree. This includes those who do not believe in free will (for example, Pereboom (2001) and Strawson (1987)). So this includes those who will endorse the first premise of the Parody. And some of these will add, not only that the second premise is true, but also that the Parody is valid. But even so, I do not think that they will seize upon the Parody as a new defense of their view. For, as already noted, they will agree that the Parody is not a good argument.

Even those who endorse the Parody's premises and affirm its validity—that is, even those who think that the Parody is sound—should agree that it is not a good argument. So they must find fault with the Parody. But I think that the only fault for them to find is that the Parody begs the question. In particular, they should claim that at least one of the premises of the Parody presupposes that argument's conclusion, and does so in such a way as to render the Parody not a good argument. No other criticism of the Parody should be plausible to those who endorse its soundness.⁹

Clearly, the Parody's second premise, (2*), does not presuppose that argument's conclusion. So the culprit must be (1*), the first premise. That is, those who think that the Parody is sound should say that that premise presupposes—in the sense of 'presupposes' relevant to begging the question—(3), the Parody's conclusion.¹⁰

And it is not only those who take the Parody to be sound who should insist that its first premise presupposes its conclusion. We should all insist on this. For imagine telling Jones that he has no choice about

9. For what it is worth, I can think of only two ways a sound argument can fail to be good. First, it can beg the question. Second, its conclusion can be necessarily true and otherwise unrelated to its premises, following only trivially from those premises; here is an example: dogs bark; therefore, there is no greatest prime number. The Parody does not fail in this second way.

10. Throughout this article, I shall use 'presuppose' to mean *presuppose in the sense relevant to begging the question*. To grant that a premise of an argument thus presupposes that argument's conclusion is thereby to grant that that argument is question-begging.

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whether he will sit just a few minutes from now, at t . And imagine telling him that he has no such choice because of the following. First, it will be true tomorrow that he sat at t ; and, second, he has no choice about that future truth. Jones ought to reply that, because he does have a choice about sitting at t , he does have a choice about whether it will be true tomorrow that he sat then. To deny that he has such a choice about that truth, he ought to insist, is to presuppose that he has no choice about whether he will sit at t .

Look at it this way. If *that Jones sits at t* will be true tomorrow—or in a thousand years—we know why it will then be true. It will then be true because, at t , Jones will sit. That future truth *depends on* Jones's sitting at t . So the claim that he does not have a choice about that future truth presupposes that he does not have a choice about sitting at t , and it presupposes this in such a way that it begs the question with respect to his having a choice about sitting at t . This illustrates a general corollary of truth's dependence on the world. The corollary is that, for all S and all p , that S has no choice about p 's truth presupposes (in the sense of 'presupposes' relevant to begging the question) that S has no choice about what p 's truth depends on (in the sense of 'depends on' in which truth depends on the world).¹¹

With this in mind, reconsider the first premise of the Main Argument:

- (1) Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.

Suppose that *that Jones sits at t* really was true a thousand years ago. Given truth's dependence on the world, we know why *that Jones sits at t* was then true. It was true because Jones will sit at t . So—recall the corollary of truth's dependence on the world—that Jones has no choice about that truth presupposes that Jones has no choice about his sitting at t . Thus (1), which is the first premise of the Main Argument, presupposes the Main Argument's conclusion, which is that Jones has no choice about his sitting at t .

11. This corollary provides new proof that every truth's "truistic" dependence on the world is not the same thing as every truth's having a truthmaker. For a parallel corollary in terms of truthmaking is false, at least given the plausible assumption that if p has a truthmaker x , x is a truthmaker for any disjunction of which p is a disjunct. For example, Jones has no choice about a necessary truth, so Jones has no choice about *either that Jones is sitting or it is false that Jones is sitting*. But this does not presuppose that Jones has no choice about his sitting.

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The Main Argument's first premise presupposes its conclusion in exactly the same way that the Parody's first premise presupposes its conclusion. Therefore, the Main Argument begs the question in exactly the same way that the Parody begs the question. And so we should conclude that the Main Argument is question-begging.

(The Main Argument closely resembles the "Consequence Argument" for incompatibilism, whose defenders include Carl Ginet (1966), David Wiggins (1973), and Peter van Inwagen (1983). In light of this resemblance, those who take the Consequence Argument to be invalid might suspect that the Main Argument itself is invalid.¹² But such suspicion is misguided. Because (1) presupposes (3), (1) entails (3). As a result, the Main Argument's premises—(1) and (2)—entail its conclusion, (3). And so the Main Argument is valid, just like every other question-begging argument.¹³)

The Main Argument is question-begging, but not because (1) says that the proposition *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago. Rather, it is question-begging because (1) says that Jones *has no choice* about that proposition's having been true a thousand years ago. So if (1) were replaced with the following, the Main Argument would cease to be question-begging:

(1**) *That Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.

(1**) begs no questions. But revising the Main Argument by replacing (1) with (1**) renders that argument invalid.

The easiest way to see that the Main Argument, thus revised, would be invalid is to consider a similarly revised—and likewise invalid—version of the Parody:

12. Van Inwagen's (1983, 94) "Beta Principle" has received the most scrutiny: (Np and $N(\text{if } p, \text{ then } q)$) entails Nq , where ' Np ' means " p and no one has, ever had, or will have a choice about p ." The Main Argument's form is not that endorsed by the Beta Principle, but is closer to (Np and Necessarily (if p , then q)) entails Nq . The counterexamples to the Beta Principle are not counterexamples to the form of the Main Argument. See discussions in Widerker 1987; McKay and Johnson 1996; Kane 1998, chap. 4; Crisp and Warfield 2000; Finch and Warfield 1998; and O'Connor 2000, chap. 1.

13. More carefully, every argument that begs the question in virtue of one or more of its premises presupposing its conclusion is valid. But an argument might also be deemed to be question-begging if it is, to borrow a phrase from Alston 1993, 15–17, "epistemically circular." An epistemically circular argument's conclusion is presupposed not by that argument's premises, but rather by one's reasons for endorsing one or more of those premises. Not all epistemically circular arguments are valid.

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- (1^{***}) *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*.

The revised Parody's form is quite similar to that of the invalid argument that Williams and Haack attribute to Aristotle. And, whatever its similarities to other invalid arguments, the revised Parody is clearly invalid. With this in mind, I conclude that revising the Main Argument by replacing (1) with (1^{**}) renders that argument invalid as well.

V. . . . and Also Has a False Premise

The (unrevised and valid) Main Argument is a question-begging failure whether or not any agent ever acts freely. But the Main Argument's failure is of interest primarily to those of us who think we do sometimes act freely. So let us assume that we do. And, to keep our focus on the Main Argument, let us assume that Jones sits freely at *t*. Jones's sitting freely at *t* implies the falsity of (3), which says that Jones has no choice about his sitting at *t*.

Recall the Main Argument's first premise:

- (1) Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.

As we saw above, (1) presupposes, and so entails, (3). Therefore the falsity of (3) entails the falsity of (1). So I say that (1) is false. ((1)'s falsity is a second failing of the Main Argument, a failing in addition to that argument's begging the question.)

Some might account for the falsity of (1) by denying that *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago, even though Jones sits at *t*. One way to deny this, we have seen, is to claim that propositions are outside time. And there is another way to deny this. One might reason as follows: a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t* existed, but was neither true nor false; so it was not true a thousand years ago; so it was not, a thousand years ago, a true proposition whose truth was something about which Jones now has no choice.

I reject this way of accounting for (1)'s falsity. For I claim that, at every time, each proposition is true or, if not true, then false (cf. Williamson 1994, 188–89). This claim implies that a thousand years ago *that Jones sits at t* was either true or, if not true, then false. But it was not

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false, since, *ex hypothesi*, Jones will sit at *t*. So *that Jones sits at t* was true. So I conclude that Jones has a choice about the truth, a thousand years ago, of *that Jones sits at t*.

Some might find this conclusion unacceptable. In particular, some might object that the past has a special kind of *necessity*. Their idea is not that the past is absolutely metaphysically necessary. Again, their idea is not that there are no “possible worlds” with histories differing from that of the actual world. Nevertheless, some do say that the past is, in some other way, necessary.¹⁴ And, so the objection we are now considering goes, the necessity of the past gives us a reason to deny that Jones now has a choice about what was true a thousand years ago. It gives us a reason to deny this, according to this objection, because the necessity of the past entails that Jones now has no such choice.

My reply to this objection begins by considering three ways one might understand the claim that the past is necessary. First, suppose that that claim is just another way of saying that no one now has (and no one in the future will have) a choice about what the past was like, not even about which propositions were true in the past. If this is all the necessity of the past amounts to, then arguments for Jones’s having no choice about sitting at *t* that start with the necessity of the past truth of *that Jones sits at t* just are the Main Argument, put in other words.

And if this is all the necessity of the past amounts to, the objection just considered fails. For that objection takes the assertion that the past is necessary to be a reason for the claim that no one now has a choice about what the past was like. But that claim cannot be a reason for itself. So let us assume that the past’s being necessary is not one and the same thing as no one’s now having a choice about what the past was like, even though the past’s being appropriately necessary is supposed to entail that no one now has such a choice. At least, it must entail this if it is to support the above objection.

Second, suppose that the past’s being necessary means only that the past cannot be changed. Because the past cannot be changed, the past is thus necessary. But the claim that the past is thus necessary does not underwrite the above objection. For it does not entail that no one now has a choice about what the past was like.

To see that it fails to have this entailment, suppose that Jones now makes *that Jones sits at t* true a thousand years *in the future*. Then it never

14. See Plantinga’s (1986, 243) discussion of arguments considered by Aquinas, Ockham, Jonathan Edwards, and Nelson Pike.

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was the case to begin with that *that Jones sits at t* will not be true a thousand years from now. But that would have had to have been the case if Jones were to have *changed* the thousand-years-in-the-future truth of *that Jones sits at t*. So Jones did not, and cannot, change the aspect of the thousand-years-hence future that is the truth of that proposition. More generally, the future is unchangeable. But this does not entail that no one now has a choice about the future. Nor, by parity of reasoning, does the unchangeableness of the past entail that no one now has a choice about the past.¹⁵

Suppose, finally, that the past's being necessary means only that our present and future actions cannot *cause* events in the past (cf. Plantinga 1986, 258). Then the past's being necessary amounts to there being no "backward" causation. But, like the unchangeableness of the past, the absence of backward causation fails to entail that no one now has a choice about what the past was like. This is because having a choice about the past truth of a proposition does not require backward causation.

It does not require backward causation because the truistic way in which the truth of a proposition depends on the world is not causal. This is why, for example, truth's dependence on the world does not involve the laws of nature or the transfer of energy. Moreover, truth's dependence on the world does not involve a *depends on* relation holding between a truth and some other relatum. (Recall section 1's brief discussion of *that there are no white ravens*.) Therefore it does not involve a causal *depends on* relation, relating cause and effect.

Or consider the following: abstract objects cause absolutely nothing. This familiar claim about abstract objects might be false. But it is not shown to be false merely by the truism that *that abstract objects exist* is true (if it is true) because abstract objects exist. That is, that truth's *depending on* abstract objects does not imply that abstract objects cause something; so it does not imply that abstract objects cause that truth to be true (cf. Merricks 2001, 105). Therefore the truistic way in which truth depends on the world is not causal. So even though *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago *because* Jones sits (or will sit or did sit) at *t*, the 'because' here is not causal. And so it is not "backward" causal.¹⁶

15. See Plantinga 1986, 244. Van Inwagen (1983, 92; 2006, 164–65) seems to conflate the (controversial) claim that one cannot have a choice about the past with the (obviously true) claim that one cannot change the past.

16. Recall that Aristotle says: "the actual thing [a man] does seem in some way the cause of the statement's [*that there is a man*] being true." But I do not think Aristotle

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Above we considered an objection to the claim that Jones now has a choice about the truth, a thousand years ago, of *that Jones sits at t*. That objection was that the past is appropriately necessary and that the past's being thus necessary gives us a reason to say that no one now has a choice about what the past was like, not even about which propositions were true in the past. But the ways in which the past is plausibly "necessary" fail to give us a reason to say that no one now has a choice about what the past was like. So this objection fails.

And failed objections to it aside, the claim that Jones even now has a choice about the past truth of *that Jones sits at t*, when *t* is in the future, should not be puzzling. To begin to see why I say this, suppose that *that Jones sits at t* is true right now. Then it is true because of (that is, its truth depends on) Jones's sitting at *t*. Add to this a second corollary of truth's dependence on the world: for all *S* and all *p*, if *S* has a choice about what *p*'s truth depends on, then *S* has a choice about *p*'s truth. Given this addition—plus the assumption that Jones has a choice about sitting at *t*—we should conclude that Jones does have a choice about the truth of *that Jones sits at t*.

This little argument involving a second corollary of truth's dependence on the world did not turn on *when* the proposition in question is true. So this argument can easily be adjusted to show, for example, that Jones now has a choice about the *future* truth of *that Jones sits at t*. And it can also show that, if indeed there are past truths about future actions, Jones now has a choice about that proposition's *past* truth. Moreover, all of this shows that Jones's having a choice about that proposition's past truth is no more or less puzzling than his having a choice about its future truth, which is to say, it is not puzzling at all.

But let us consider one last attempt to make it seem puzzling. So consider this argument: Jones did not exist a thousand years ago; so, a thousand years ago, Jones did not do anything; so, a thousand years ago, he did not exercise control over anything; so, a thousand years ago, he did not exercise control over the truth of *that Jones sits at t*; so Jones has

claims that a man is (what we would nowadays call) a *bona fide* cause—that is, an Aristotelian efficient cause—of the truth of *that there is a man*. And even with his broad notions of causation, Aristotle hedges, saying that the man "does seem in some way" the cause of the statement's being true. He glosses that way with the unobjectionable: "it is because the actual thing exists or does not that the statement is called true or false."

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no choice about that proposition's having been true a thousand years ago.¹⁷

This argument purports to raise worries about whether one has a choice about past truths about one's present and future actions. But a very straightforward adaptation of this argument seems to show something far more striking. The following adaptation seems to rule out one's having a choice about future truths about one's present and future actions.

Jones will not exist a thousand years in the future; so, a thousand years from now, he will not do anything; so, a thousand years from now, he will not exercise control over anything; so, a thousand years from now, he will not exercise control over the truth of *that Jones sits at t*; so Jones has no choice about that proposition's being true a thousand years in the future.

We have the resources to block both of the arguments just considered. *That Jones sits at t* is true, whenever it is true, because Jones sits at *t*. Jones has a choice about that proposition's being true if he has a choice about whether he sits at *t*. Since *t* is a few moments from now, Jones does not need to exist (or exercise control) a thousand years from now to have a choice about his sitting at *t*. Therefore he does not need to exist (or exercise control) a thousand years from now to have a choice about the thousand-years-hence truth of *that Jones sits at t*. For similar reasons, he does not need to have existed (or have exercised control) a thousand years ago to have a choice about the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t*. The arguments just considered go wrong by assuming that Jones must exist (and exercise control) at a particular time if he is to have a choice about whether *that Jones sits at t* is true at that time.¹⁸

17. This argument is inspired by an argument given by Finch and Rea (2008). Finch and Rea's argument takes aim at Ockhamism, which will be discussed in the following section. But, obviously, the argument I have just offered, which is inspired by their argument, threatens my reply to the Main Argument. Finch and Rea show that their argument can be blocked by "eternalism" about time. (Rea shows the same thing about the argument of Rea 2006, discussed below.) But they think that their argument goes through given "presentism" about time. But, as we shall see, I shall block the argument inspired by their argument without relying on any particular view of time.

18. Similarly, Rea 2006, 518, affirms this principle:

(M5) If the truth of a proposition *p* at a past time *t_n* was not even partly grounded in the occurrence of any event involving S, or in the agent causal activity of S, then S has never had and will never have a choice about whether *p* was true at *t_n*.

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Consider:

- (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.

Also, suppose that *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago. This supposition and (0) together imply the Main Argument's premise (1), which says that Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.

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. And so, one might claim, the Main Argument thus recast, unlike the original version of the Main Argument, is not question-begging (section 4).

But the Main Argument, thus recast, still fails. This failure is one moral of the above discussion of the necessity of the past. For suppose that the past's being necessary amounts to the past's being

Rea concludes that the truth of a proposition at a past time cannot be (even partly) grounded in an event involving *S* or the agent causal activity of *S* if *S* existed only *after* that past time (see Rea 2006, 518–20). But I think that the reasoning that leads Rea to this conclusion ought also to lead him to conclude that the truth of a proposition at a past time cannot be (even partly) grounded in an event involving *S* or the agent causal activity of *S* if *S* existed only *before* that past time. More generally, I think that Rea should add that the truth of a proposition at a time cannot be (even partly) grounded in an event involving *S* or the agent causal activity of *S* if *S* did not exist at that time.

If Rea did add this, then his reasoning would have implications for propositions that are true in the future. For example, Rea's reasoning—combined with (M5)—would imply that if *S* will not exist a thousand years in the future, then *S* does not now have a choice about the thousand-years-hence truth of any proposition, including propositions about *S*'s current and future free actions.

But I say, as a result of the arguments of this article, that *S* can now have a choice about the thousand-years-hence truth of *p*, even if *S* will not exist in a thousand years; *S* can now have such a choice if *p*'s thousand-years-hence truth will appropriately depend on what *S* is now about to freely do. Similarly, I say that *S* can now have a choice about the thousand-years-ago truth of *p*, even if *S* did not exist a thousand years ago; *S* now has such a choice if *p*'s thousand-years-ago truth appropriately depended on what *S* is now about to freely do. So I conclude, at least given what Rea takes to be necessary for grounding, that (M5) is false.

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unchangeable. Or suppose that it amounts to there being no backward causation. Either way, the second clause of (0) is false, and so (0) itself is false.

Of course, we are not yet done with (0). For perhaps the past's being necessary is nothing other than no one's having a choice, from here on out, about anything in the past, not even about the past truth of propositions about present and future actions. This account of the necessity of the past renders the second clause of (0) trivial, and thus secures the truth of that clause.

But I think that this account of the necessity of the past implies the falsity of the first clause of (0), and so the falsity of (0) itself. After all, since truth depends on the world, the past truth of some propositions depended on what will happen. Assuming that we now have a choice about some of what will happen, it follows that—recall our second corollary—we now have a choice about the past truth of some propositions. So if the (alleged) necessity of the past is nothing other than the (alleged) relevant lack of choice, then (0) is false.

Some might resist this argument for (0)'s falsity. In particular, some might deny that we now have a choice about the past truth of some propositions. Of course, in light of the arguments of this article, I think their denial is mistaken. And I have another complaint about their denial. Their denial presupposes (among other things) the truth of (1). (Recall that (1) is the claim that Jones has no choice about the past truth of a certain proposition.) If (0) must be defended, and can be defended only by presupposing (1), then the recast Main Argument loses any advantage, with respect to begging the question, that it may have had over the original Main Argument.

Return to the original version of the Main Argument, the argument beginning with (1). We have seen that that argument fails. And the ways in which the Main Argument fails guarantee the failure of any initially compelling argument that moves from truths about the future to a lack of freedom. For any such argument must assume that we have no choice about the long-ago truth of propositions about our present and future actions. But, as we saw in section 4, that assumption presupposes our present and future lack of freedom. So any such argument will be question-begging. Moreover, that assumption is also false, at least when the proposition in question concerns a present or future free action (section 6).

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VI. Ockhamism

In *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, William of Ockham claimed that we now have a choice about the past truth of propositions about our present and future actions. So Ockhamists reject this premise of the Main Argument:

- (1) Jones has no choice about: *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.

That is, Ockhamists reject (1) even given that *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago. So do I. But this resemblance between us is superficial. For my reasons for rejecting (1) are not the reasons of the Ockhamist. Indeed, there are at least three important ways in which my treatment of the Main Argument differs from Ockhamism.

First, 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.

Second, one of my arguments for the falsity of (1), even given the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t*, turned on a corollary of truth's dependence on the world: for all S and all p , if S has a choice about what p 's truth depends on, then S has a choice about p 's truth. Ockhamists do not rely on this corollary.

Suppose that you reject the first premise of the Main Argument. And suppose you do so because you insist that Jones now has a choice about the truth, a thousand years ago, of *that Jones sits at t*. The obvious question is: *why* does Jones have such a choice? This is the obvious question because Jones lacks a choice about most of what the world was like a thousand years ago. For example, he has no choice about who was king of the Britons a thousand years ago.¹⁹

19. Paul Horwich (1987, 30) would agree with the Ockhamists, and also with me, that Jones now has a choice about the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t*. For, Horwich would argue, it is better to say that Jones has such a choice than to accept fatalism or to reject bivalence—and Horwich says that fatalistic arguments force us to do one of the three.

I think that Horwich needs to tell us why, if we now have a choice about some of what was true in the past, we do not now have a choice about other facets of the past, such as who was king of the Britons. And Horwich seems to have an answer. His answer seems to be that no one now has a choice about the existence (or occurrence) of any past event (1987, 30). Similarly, I assume that Horwich would answer that no one now has a choice about the past exemplification of any property. But I think these

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The Ockhamists now among us have an answer to this question, which answer drives their objection to (1). It is that the past truth of *that Jones sits at t* is, when *t* is not itself past, a “soft fact” about the past; because it is a soft fact about the past, someone even now has a choice about it; in this case, that someone is Jones; and so (1) is false. They would add that if a fact about the past is a “hard fact,” no one now has a choice about it (see, e.g., Adams 1967).²⁰

Given this answer, these Ockhamists should not define ‘soft fact’ as a fact about which someone even now has a choice. For if they did, the claim that a particular fact about the past is “soft” would be nothing other than—and so could not be a reason for—the conclusion that someone even now has a choice about it.

Nevertheless, these Ockhamists must make sense of the distinction between soft facts and hard facts and must do so in such a way that a fact about the past’s being soft implies that someone or other now has (or will have) a choice about it. Moreover, their way of making sense of that distinction had better imply that the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t* is a soft fact. And it had also better imply, for example,

answers are not consistent with Horwich’s claim that we now have a choice about some of what was true in the past.

They are not consistent because if Jones has a choice about the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t*, Jones thereby has a choice about the past exemplification of a property, namely, the thousand-years-ago exemplification of *being true* by *that Jones sits at t*. And if there are events, Jones thereby has a choice about the existence, a thousand years ago, of the event of *that Jones sits at t’s exemplifying being true*. (And see sec. 7 for an argument that Jones has a choice about what God believed in the past.)

Horwich (1998) might respond by denying that a proposition’s being true amounts to its exemplifying the property of *being true*. For my defense of the property of *being true*, see Merricks 2007, 187–91.

Consider an argument much like the Main Argument, but which begins with the premise that Jones has no choice about: a thousand years ago, rock *R* exemplified the property of *being such that Jones will sit at t*. I would respond to this argument by denying that rock *R* did exemplify the property of *being such that Jones will sit at t*; I would deny this partly because I doubt that there is any such property at all. One reason that I find the Main Argument more interesting than the parallel argument involving rock *R* is that I think there is a property of *being true*.

20. Plantinga (1986) seems to be an exception since he seems to think that someone now has a choice about some hard facts about the past. Nevertheless, Plantinga would deny that anyone has a choice about an “accidentally necessary” fact about the past—and the distinction, among contingent facts about the past, between the nonaccidentally necessary and the accidentally necessary does the work for Plantinga that the distinction between soft facts and hard facts does for other Ockhamists.

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that Llywelyn ap Seisyll's being king of the Britons a thousand years ago is a hard fact.

Ockham himself does not use the terms 'soft fact' or 'hard fact' (or, for that matter, the terms '*factum molle*' or '*factum durum*'). But he does draw a distinction that is similar to—or, perhaps arguably, the same as—the soft fact/hard fact distinction. To get a sense of Ockham's distinction, pretend that it is one thousand years before *t*. Then Ockham would say that *that Jones sits at t* is "about the present as regards [its] wording only and [is] equivalently about the future." Still pretending that it is one thousand years before *t*, I think Ockham would also say that *that Llewellyn ap Seisyll is king of the Britons* is "about the present as regards both [its] wording and [its] subject matter" (Ockham, *Predestination . . .*, Assumption 3 [1983, 46–47]).

Ockham might add that a past truth's being about the past in wording only, and being equivalently about the future, implies that someone or other now has (or will have) a choice about that past truth. And he might further add that a past truth's being about the past as regards both its wording and subject matter implies that no one now has (or ever will have) a choice about that past truth.

All of this highlights a third difference between my approach and Ockhamism. Unlike the Ockhamists, I rely on neither a distinction between "soft facts" and "hard facts" nor on a distinction between what propositions are about with respect to "wording" and about with respect to "subject matter." So I do not have to make sense of these distinctions at all, much less in a way that delivers certain results, results like: for each soft fact about the past, someone or other now has (or will have) a choice about it.²¹

Given that Jones lacks a choice about most of what the world was like a thousand years ago, why does he now have a choice about the truth, a thousand years ago, of *that Jones sits at t*? My answer was given in sections 4 and 5. Jones even now has that choice because, first, truth depends on the world, and, second, he has a choice about sitting at *t*. And note that neither truth's dependence on the world nor anything else I have defended above suggests that someone now has a choice about, for example, who was king of the Britons a thousand years ago.

21. Fischer (1983; 1989, 32–48) argues that Ockhamists have not articulated, and cannot articulate, an account of soft facts that delivers the relevant results. I assume that he would say the same about Plantinga's (contingent and) nonaccidentally necessary facts about the past and Ockham's past truths that are about the past in wording only, and are equivalently about the future.

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We have seen three ways in which my approach to the Main Argument differs from Ockhamism. I shall now explain a fourth difference between my approach to the Main Argument and that of at least some Ockhamists.

S has “counterfactual power” over a past event *E* if and only if *S* is able to perform some action *A*, and if *S* were to perform action *A*, *E* would not have occurred. For example, suppose that Jones is now able to refrain from sitting at *t*. In the “nearest possible world” in which he refrains from sitting at *t*, *that Jones sits at t* was not true a thousand years ago. Therefore, Jones now has counterfactual power over whether the event of *that Jones sits at t*’s being true occurred a thousand years ago, and therefore over whether *that Jones sits at t* was true a thousand years ago.

Some Ockhamists seem to assume that Jones’s now having counterfactual power over the past truth of a proposition is sufficient for the past truth of that proposition’s being a soft fact. Moreover, and in the parlance of the Main Argument, they seem to treat having counterfactual power over a past truth as sufficient for having a choice about that past truth (see Fisher 1989, 18–23; Plantinga 1974, 69–73; Saunders 1966). But, as we shall see, I think that they are mistaken.

Suppose that I cleaned my house yesterday because my brother is going to visit tomorrow. Suppose that my brother’s visiting will be done freely. Suppose that in the “nearest world” in which he does not visit tomorrow, he never intended to visit. And suppose that, in that world, he never told me that he was going to visit. So in that world I did not clean the house yesterday. And so, if my brother were not to visit me tomorrow, I would not have cleaned the house yesterday.

Given these suppositions, my brother is now able to do something (namely, not visit me tomorrow) such that, if he were to do it, I would not have cleaned the house yesterday. That is, my brother has “counterfactual power” over my cleaning the house yesterday. Some might conclude that my brother now has a genuine choice about whether I cleaned the house yesterday. But, for what it is worth, this seems to me to be the wrong conclusion. I conclude, instead, that having counterfactual power over a past event is not sufficient for having a genuine choice about whether that past event occurred.²²

22. My suppositions about the “nearest world” in which my brother fails to visit might be false. But I think that there are at least some true counterfactuals that deliver the result that someone now has counterfactual power over a past event, an event

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In debates over freedom, ‘being able to bring about something’ is often treated as if it has at most two disambiguations: having counterfactual power over that something’s occurrence and being able to cause that something (cf. Lewis 1981; Fisher 1989, 18–23). With this in mind, one might ask what my claim that Jones has a choice about the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t* amounts to. This is a nice question for two reasons. First, I have just committed myself to the position that his having counterfactual power over that truth is not sufficient for his having such a choice. Second, I deny that his having such a choice involves his being able to (backward) cause that truth (see section 5).

Before answering this question, I want us to suppose that *t* is a few moments from now and that Jones has a genuine choice about whether he will sit at *t*. (Assuming his sitting will be free, this seems to be a paradigm case of having a genuine choice.) Given this supposition, it should be uncontroversial that Jones—before *t*—has a genuine choice about whether *that Jones sits at t* will be true at *t*.

Now for my answer. My claim that Jones has a choice about the thousand-years-ago truth of *that Jones sits at t* amounts to the following. Jones has a choice about that past truth in exactly the same way that he has a choice about the truth, at time *t*, of *that Jones sits at t*. And so he has a genuine choice about that past truth. All of this should bring to mind the second corollary of truth’s dependence on the world: if an agent has a choice about performing some action like sitting, and if the truth of a proposition depends on the performance of that action, then the agent has a choice about the truth of that proposition.

VII. Foreknowledge

Smith once made a lucky guess. Ten years ago, she guessed that Jones would sit at *t*. And, as *t* approaches, Jones is about to sit. With this in mind, consider the *Lucky Guess Argument*:

- (4) Jones has no choice about: Smith’s belief *that Jones sits at t* was true ten years ago.
- (5) Necessarily, if Smith’s belief *that Jones sits at t* was true ten years ago, then Jones sits at time *t*.

about which he or she seems to lack a genuine choice. See, for example, Plantinga’s (1986) argument, on the basis of such counterfactuals, that he might now have counterfactual power over whether Abraham ever existed. Also, Lewis 1981 argues that we have counterfactual power over the laws of nature.

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Therefore,

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

My belief *that there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens. Your belief *that dogs bark* is true because dogs bark. And so on. In general, a belief's truth depends on the world. This dependence has a corollary: for all persons S and all beliefs b , that S has no choice about b 's truth presupposes that S has no choice about what b 's truth depends on. To defend this corollary, simply mimic section 4's defense of the parallel corollary involving propositions. (And if a belief just is a proposition that is believed, this corollary about beliefs is simply an instance of the parallel corollary about propositions.)

This corollary involving beliefs implies that the first premise of the Lucky Guess Argument presupposes (3), that argument's conclusion. Thus, like the Main Argument, the Lucky Guess Argument is question-begging. Moreover, suppose that Jones freely sits at t . Then Jones has a choice about what the truth of Smith's belief depended on, which implies that Jones has a choice about whether Smith's belief was true ten years ago. Then the Lucky Guess Argument, again like the Main Argument, has a false first premise.

Start with the Lucky Guess Argument. Replace Smith with God. (And dispense with all talk of "luck" and "guesses.") The resulting argument is merely a variant of the Lucky Guess Argument. So the resulting argument is, like the Lucky Guess Argument, question-begging, and presumably has a false premise.²³

The Lucky Guess Argument and its variants resemble the Main Argument by making claims about Jones's not having a choice about something's having been true. And they can be shown to fail, like the Main Argument, by focusing on truth's dependence on the world. But an argument that made no mention of truth would not be merely a variant of the Lucky Guess argument (cf. Pike 1965, 40–46). Nor would an argument that made no mention of truth run afoul of truth's dependence on the world. With this in mind, consider the *Divine Foreknowledge Argument*:

- (6) Jones has no choice about: God believed *that Jones sits at t a thousand years ago*.²⁴

23. Some philosophers—from Augustine (*On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. 3, sec. 4 [1993, 78]) to Ayer (1963, 252)—have treated divine foreknowledge as if it is no more (or less) of a threat to freedom than is human foreknowledge.

24. Some hold that God is outside time and so, they conclude, God did not believe anything *a thousand years ago* (see Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and,

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- (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*.

God is essentially omniscient. That is, necessarily, God believes all and only truths. Thus the second premise of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument is true, even though that premise makes no mention of truth, but instead mentions merely what God believed. (A parallel premise regarding merely what Smith believed would be false.)

My objection to this argument builds on an idea that goes back at least to Origen, who says: “. . . 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.”²⁵ Similarly, I say that God has certain beliefs about the world because of how the world is, was, or will be—and not vice versa. 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.²⁶

These observations do not, all by themselves, show that the Divine Foreknowledge Argument fails. For that argument's conclusion is not that Jones sits at *t* because God believed, long ago, *that Jones sits at t*, rather than vice versa. Instead, the Divine Foreknowledge Argument merely moves from foreknowledge as a premise to the relevant lack of choice as a conclusion.

Recall Edwards's remark quoted earlier (section 2): “Infallible foreknowledge may *prove* the necessity of the thing foreknown, and yet

more recently, Stump and Kretzmann 1991). They would take God's being outside time to undermine the Divine Foreknowledge Argument. But see Plantinga 1983, 240; Wierenga 1991, 430–33; and van Inwagen 2008.

25. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, bk. 7, chap. 8, sec. 5 [2002, 90]. Molina (*Concordia* 4, disputation 52, sec. 19 [1988, 179]) joins Origen in taking God's beliefs about the future to depend on what will happen, rather than the other way around.

26. Some might claim that the way the world is depends on God's beliefs, not vice versa. And they might say that Aquinas makes this same claim, citing the *Summa Theologica* (1a.q.14.a8 [1945, 147–48]) and the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1.67.5 [1975, 222]). But Aquinas's claim has to do with *causal* dependence. And so Aquinas does not deny my thesis that God's beliefs about the future depend on what will happen; more carefully, he does not deny the version of this thesis—articulated at the end of this section—according to which God's beliefs about the future are not caused by what happens in the future. Note also that Aquinas explicitly says that he does not disagree with Origen on this issue (*Summa Theologica* 1a.q.14.a8, reply Obj. 1).

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not be the thing which *causes* the necessity.” Edwards makes this remark while showing that Origen’s idea above does not, all by itself, block arguments from foreknowledge to a lack of freedom. So we must say more than did Origen if we are to show that the Divine Foreknowledge Argument fails.

Nevertheless, I begin with Origen’s insight: God’s beliefs depend on the world. This has a corollary: for all *S* and all God’s beliefs *b*, that *S* has no choice about whether God has belief *b* presupposes (in the sense of ‘presupposes’ relevant to begging the question) that *S* has no choice about what God’s having belief *b* depends on (in the sense of ‘depends on’ in which God’s beliefs depend on the world). We can defend this by mimicking the defense of the similar corollary involving the truth of propositions.

For example, 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 is, will have the belief) 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 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. At the very least, the claim that you do not have a choice about God’s believing this at noon tomorrow presupposes that you do not have a choice about eating lunch at noon tomorrow.

Recall the first premise of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument:

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

Given the above corollary regarding God’s beliefs, we can conclude that this premise presupposes the conclusion of that argument, which is:

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

So I object that the Divine Foreknowledge Argument, like the Main Argument and the Lucky Guess Argument, is question-begging.

The first premise of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument presupposes (and so entails) that argument’s conclusion. I assume that this conclusion is false since I assume that Jones will sit freely at *t*. Therefore,

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I object that the first premise of the Divine Foreknowledge Argument is false. That is, I think it is false even if God really did believe, a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t*. I think that Jones, even now, has a choice about what God believed a thousand years ago.

(6)'s presupposing (3) is not the only reason to say that Jones now has such a choice. Another reason is that, first, Jones has a choice about sitting at *t*, and, second, God's having—even a thousand years ago—the belief *that Jones sits at t* depended on Jones's sitting at *t*. This is in all relevant respects just like the case above, in which you have a choice about God's believing, at noon tomorrow, that you are then eating lunch.²⁷

Suppose the dependence of God's beliefs on the world implies that the world causes God's beliefs. Suppose, further, that God's beliefs about future events are caused by those future events. Then we have backward causation. Perhaps this sort of backward causation is acceptable, even if backward causation takes a miracle, since God's foreknowledge itself—like everything else about God?—might be miraculous.

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 (section 5). 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

27. Ockhamists say that Jones has a choice about what God believed a thousand years ago, but for a reason other than my reasons. They might say, for example, that God's having had a belief a thousand years ago about the present or the future is a soft fact about the past. Of course, neither Ockhamists nor I say that Jones can *change* what God believed (see section 5).

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believed, a thousand years ago, *that Jones sits at t* because Jones will sit at *t*.

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