



FREE WILL

VS.

FATE

&

FOREKNOWLEDGE

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We've been discussing the free will defense as a response to the argument from evil. This response assumes something about us: that we have free will.

But what does this mean?

To say that we have free will is to say that some of our actions are up to us; they are under our control.

Can we come up with a more informative **definition** of free will? What is it for an action to be up to us, or to be under our control?

Any definition we give will be (for reasons which will become clear) controversial. But notice that that does not mean that we can't know anything about which actions (if any) are free. To use an example we've discussed before, it is notoriously difficult to define words like "table" and "chair." But we surely know that some things are tables, and some things are chairs.

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Any definition we give will be (for reasons which will become clear) controversial. But notice that that does not mean that we can't know anything about which actions (if any) are free. To use an example we've discussed before, it is notoriously difficult to define words like "table" and "chair." But we surely know that some things are tables, and some things are chairs.

Further — and again, despite the fact that we cannot define "table" or "chair" — we know some things about what it would take to be a table or chair. I suggest that it is reasonable to suppose the same about free action.

The question we'll be asking ourselves for the next two weeks is: do we have free will? Our discussion will involve us considering the three strongest arguments **against** the view that we have free will.

But before doing that it is worth asking why there is any reason to accept the common view that we do have free will. Are there any arguments in **favor** of the reality of free will?

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But before doing that it is worth asking why there is any reason to accept the common view that we do have free will. Are there any arguments in favor of the reality of free will?

There are. The first argument starts with an apparent fact about moral responsibility: it seems (at least to a first approximation) that we are only responsible for actions which we freely perform. If you find out that someone's action was not done of their own free will, then it would be odd to blame them for their action.

But it also seems that people are at least sometimes genuinely responsible for their actions.

This suggests the following simple argument:

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This suggests the following simple argument:

## THE ARGUMENT FROM MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. If someone's action is not free, then they are not responsible for that action.
2. We are all responsible for at least some of our actions.

-----  
C. At least some of our actions are free.

How should someone who does not believe in free will respond?

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A second argument is similar, and starts from an apparent fact about relationships: genuinely loving relationships of a certain sort must be freely entered into.

This is not true of all loving relationships; for example, the love of a child for a parent is an obvious counterexample. But certain kinds of loving relationships, like those between spouses or friends, seem to require an element of freedom.

But if this is true then we can construct an argument in the obvious way:

### THE ARGUMENT FROM LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

1. Certain kinds of loving relationships must be freely entered into.
  2. These kinds of loving relationships exist.
- 
- C. People in such relationships exercise free will.

A third argument begins with the premise that it really, really, seems as though we have free will.

This, by itself, might not seem to be a very impressive fact. But consider for a moment your beliefs about the color of the carpet. Do you have any reason for believing that the carpet is a certain color other than that it really seems to you to be that color?

Of course, you wouldn't form your belief about the carpet if you knew that you were wearing tinted glasses or otherwise subject to an illusion of some kind. But your current situation is not like that; you have no particular reason to doubt that the world is as it seems.

This might suggest the following general rule:

If the world seems to you to be some way, and you have no reason to doubt that the world is that way, then you should believe that the world is that way.

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This might suggest the following general rule:

If the world seems to you to be some way, and you have no reason to doubt that the world is that way, then you should believe that the world is that way.

But then we can argue as follows:

### THE ARGUMENT FROM SEEMING

1. It seems to me that I have free will.
2. If the world seems to you to be some way, and you have no reason to doubt that the world is that way, then you should believe that the world is that way.
3. I have no reason to doubt that I have free will.

-----  
C. I should believe that I have free will.

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## THE ARGUMENT FROM SEEMING

1. It seems to me that I have free will.
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3. I have no reason to doubt that I have free will.

-----  
C. I should believe that I have free will.

What we are going to see over the next three classes is that premise (3) of this argument can be called into question.

Our first topic today is the oldest challenge to the existence of free will: the challenge to freedom that comes from **fate**.

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Our first topic today is the oldest challenge to the existence of free will: the challenge to freedom that comes from **fate**.

What does it mean to believe in fate? To believe in fate is to believe that there are now truths about all of the future actions that any of us will undertake.

So, for example, if fate is real then it is already true now that you will marry a certain person, on a certain date, at a certain time. Or, to pick a more grim example, there is already a truth about the exact moment you will die, and how.

We might imagine that all of the facts about your life — past, present, and future — are written down in a dusty book in a library somewhere. Of course, there is no such book. But, if fate is real, then there could be. The truths are all there, whether or not they have been written down.

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So let's ask the question: is there such a thing as fate?

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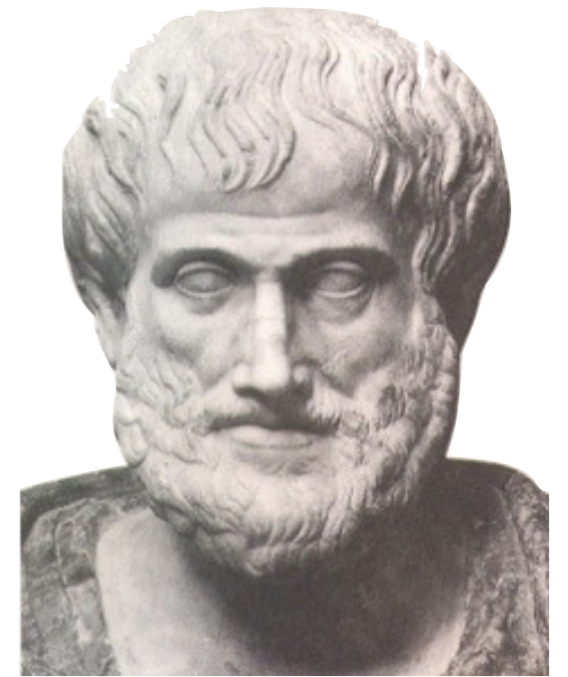
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So let's ask the question: is there such a thing as fate?

An argument for the reality of fate was given by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle.

Aristotle's argument begins with a statement of the following logical principle:



**The law of the excluded middle**  
For any proposition  $P$ , either  $P$  is true or  $\text{Not-}P$  is true.

Why might one think this is true? Propositions say that the world is a certain way. It seems that there are just two possibilities: either the world is that way, or it is not. In the first case, the proposition is true. In the second case, its negation is true. So, either way, either  $P$  is true, or  $\text{Not-}P$  is true.

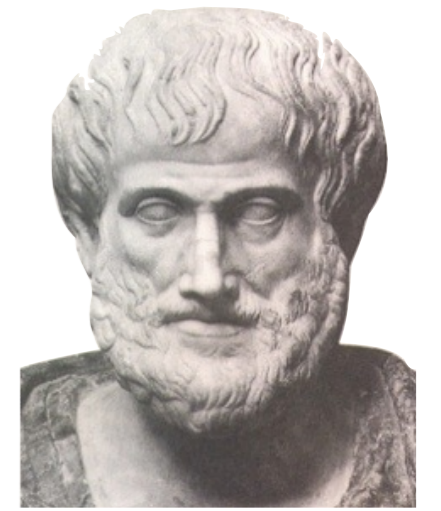
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**The law of the excluded middle**  
For any proposition  $P$ , either  $P$  is true or  $\text{Not-}P$  is true.



To see why the Law of the Excluded Middle (LEM) leads to fate, consider a proposition about a possible future free action of yours.

You will get married on July 1, 2030.

The LEM tells us that either (i) this is true, or (ii) its negation is true.

You will not get married on July 1, 2030.

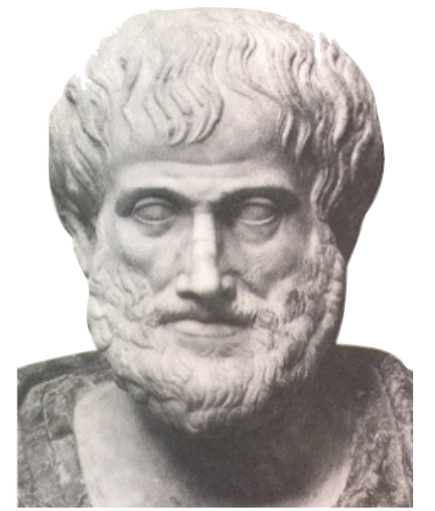
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**The law of the excluded middle**  
For any proposition  $P$ , either  $P$  is true or  $\text{Not-}P$  is true.



To see why the Law of the Excluded Middle (LEM) leads to fate, consider a proposition about a possible future free action of yours.

You will get married on July 1, 2030.

You will not get married on July 1, 2030.

But notice that, whichever of these is true, there is now a truth about whether you will get married on that day. So fate is real.

And nothing depended on this particular choice of an example. So, for any possible future action of yours, there is now a truth about whether and when you will perform it.

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And nothing depended on this particular choice of an example. So, for any possible future action of yours, there is now a truth about whether and when you will perform it.

We might call this the **logical** argument for fate:

### THE LOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR FATE

1. For any proposition P, either P is true or Not-P is true. (Law of the Excluded Middle)
  2. Either it is true that you will get married on 6/1/30 or it is true that you will not get married on 6/1/30.  
(1)
- 
- C. There are now truths about what you will do on 6/1/30.  
(2)

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A second argument for the reality of fate is based, not on logic alone, but on certain widely held views about God.

It is widely held that God is omniscient, and also widely held that (for this reason) God knows what actions you will perform in the future.

But if God knows what actions you will perform in the future, there must be truths about what actions you will perform in the future (otherwise there would be nothing for God to know).

We can put this together into the **theological** argument for fate.

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We can put this together into the **theological** argument for fate.

## THE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR FATE

1. God knows what actions you will perform in the future.
2. If God knows what actions you will perform in the future, there are truths about what actions you will perform in the future.

-----  
C. There are truths about what actions you will perform in the future. (1,2)

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We now have two candidate facts, either of which might make trouble for the reality of free will.

**Fate:** there are truths about everything you will do in the future.

**Foreknowledge:** God knows everything about what you will do in the future.

One might of course accept the reality of fate without accepting the reality of foreknowledge.

Our question is: do either fate or foreknowledge pose a serious challenge to the reality of free will?

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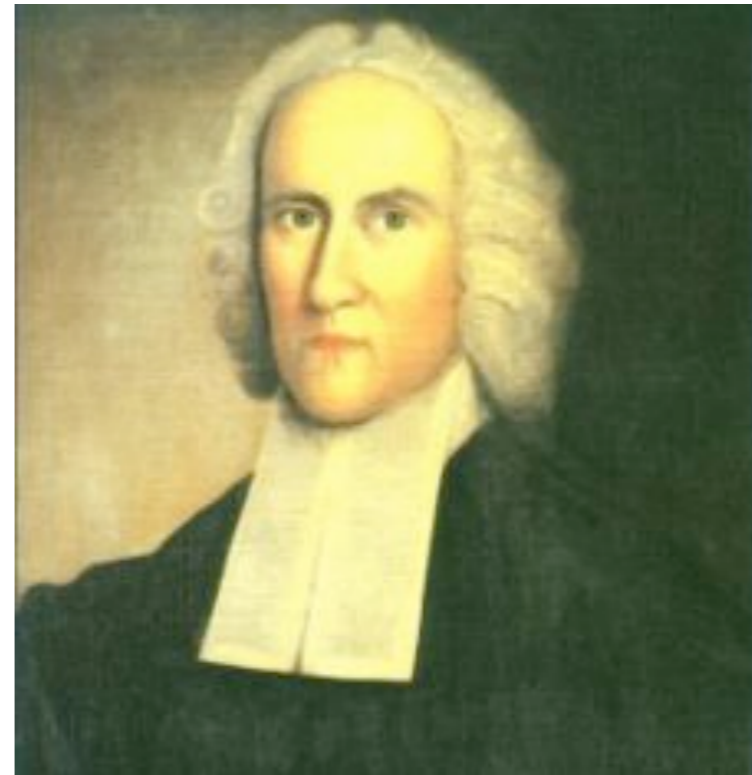
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Our question is: do either fate or foreknowledge pose a serious challenge to the reality of free will?

They do. The best way to see how this argument might work is to start with the challenge posed by God's foreknowledge of our actions. We'll come back to fate after that.

The argument we're going to talk about is due to Jonathan Edwards.

Edwards was an 18th century American philosopher, theologian and preacher, perhaps best known now for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God."



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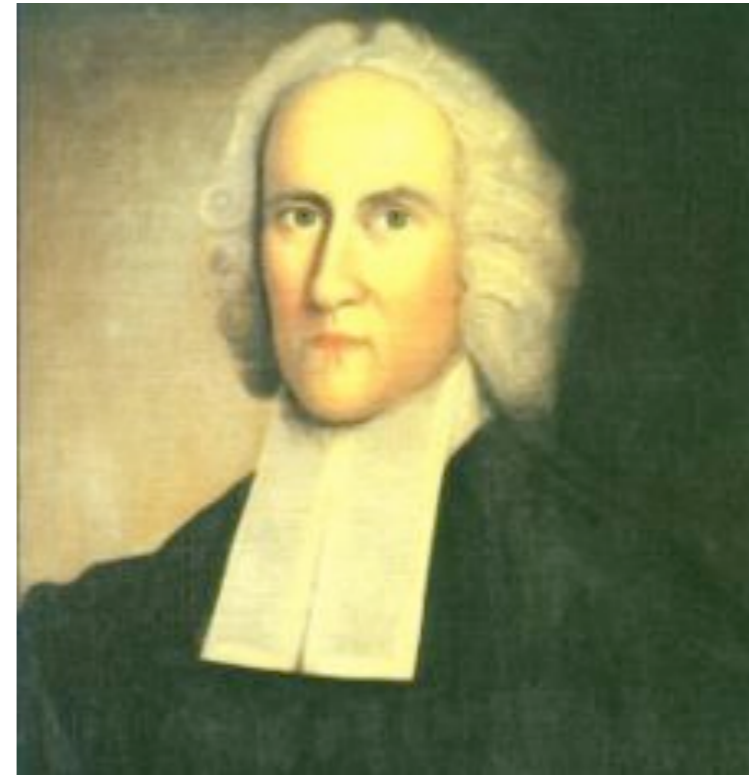
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The argument we're going to talk about is due to Jonathan Edwards.

Edwards was an 18th century American philosopher, theologian and preacher, perhaps best known now for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God."



Edwards lays out his argument in four numbered paragraphs, each of which corresponds to a premise in his argument.

The first is this one:

“1. I observed before, in explaining the nature of necessity, that in things which are past, their past existence is now necessary: having already made sure of existence, it is too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect ... ”

In other words:

1. We have no choice about past facts.

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“1. I observed before, in explaining the nature of necessity, that in things which are past, their past existence is now necessary: having already made sure of existence, it is too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect ... ”

1. We have no choice about past facts.

“2. If there be any such thing as a divine foreknowledge of the volitions of free agents, that foreknowledge ... is a thing which already has, and long ago had, existence; and so, now its existence is necessary.”

What is Edwards saying here?

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

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“1. I observed before, in explaining the nature of necessity, that in things which are past, their past existence is now necessary: having already made sure of existence, it is too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect ... ”

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Premises 1 and 2 of Edwards' argument imply a further claim about the status of God's foreknowledge of our actions.

1. We have no choice about past facts.

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

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1. We have no choice about past facts.

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“3. It is also very manifest, that those things which are indissolubly connected with other things that are necessary, are themselves necessary.”

As elsewhere, Edwards is using “necessary” to mean “something we don't have any choice about.” What does it mean for two things to be **indissolubly** connected?

The idea is that the connection is not possible to break — it is, in terms familiar from the cosmological argument, a **necessary connection**.

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As elsewhere, Edwards is using “necessary” to mean “something we don’t have any choice about.” What does it mean for two things to be **indissolubly** connected?

The idea is that the connection is not possible to break — it is, in terms familiar from the cosmological argument, a **necessary** connection.

Suppose that we have a situation in which, if A happens, then B necessarily follows. Or, to put the same point a different way, suppose that it is impossible for A to happen and B not to happen. In that situation, we’ll say that A **necessitates** B.

In these terms, we can put Edwards’ thought from the above quote as follows:

4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.

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1. We have no choice about past facts.

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.

There is one more premise in Edwards' argument which needs discussion.

“4. It is no less evident, that if there be a full, certain, and infallible foreknowledge of the future existence of the volitions of moral agents, then there is a certain infallible and indissoluble connection between those events and that foreknowledge.”

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“4. It is no less evident, that if there be a full, certain, and infallible foreknowledge of the future existence of the volitions of moral agents, then there is a certain infallible and indissoluble connection between those events and that foreknowledge.”

Edwards is saying that there is an **indissoluble** connection between something being known, and its being true. An indissoluble connection is one that cannot be broken.

But if the connection between God knowing that I will do X and me doing X is unbreakable, that implies:

5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

Note that this does **not** say that God’s knowledge causes us to perform the action. It just says that it is impossible for God to know that I will do X, and I not do X.

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3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.

5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

But now focus on premises 3, 4, and 5.

Premise 3 mentions something that we have no choice about.

Premise 5 says that this thing necessitates a future action of ours.

Premise 4 says that if both those things are the case, then we also have no choice about that future action.

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1. We have no choice about past facts.

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4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.

5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

But then it seems to follow that:

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions.

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past facts.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the fact that God knows that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.
5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

-----  
C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past facts.
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3. We have no choice about the fact that God knows that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.
5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

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C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

Now that we have this argument on the table, notice that it can be improved in one respect.

Premise (1) is more broad than it needs to be. We don't need to assume that we have no choice about **any** past fact; we just need to assume that we have no choice now about what God knew in the past.

So let's make a small change.

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about what God knew in the past.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the fact that God knows that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.
5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

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C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

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  5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.
- 
- C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

It is tempting to reply to the Foreknowledge Argument by saying that while God does know what we are going to do, God does not **make** us do anything.

But suppose that that is true. Does that call into question any of the premises of the argument?

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- 
- C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

It is tempting to try to reconcile God's foreknowledge with our freedom by saying that God knows all of the choices we will face, and knows what would happen if we made various decisions, but does not know what decisions we will make.

It is important to see that this is **not** a way of reconciling foreknowledge with freedom — it is a simple denial of foreknowledge.

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

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5. God knowing that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

-----  
C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

We'll soon consider some possible responses to Edwards' argument.

But before we do that, let's ask: can we come up with an argument similar to the Foreknowledge Argument which is based, not on foreknowledge, but on fate?

We can.

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about **what God knew** in the past.
2. In the past, **God had foreknowledge of** our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the fact that God knows that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.
5. **God knowing** that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

-----  
C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

We can.

Notice that the only independent premises which say anything about God's foreknowledge are (1), (2) and (5).

What happens if we replace those with premises that just talk about there being truths about the future?

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about **what God knew** in the past.
2. In the past, **God had foreknowledge of** our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the fact that God knows that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.
5. **God knowing** that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

-----  
C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

## THE FATALIST ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about **past facts**.
2. In the past, **there were truths about** our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the truth that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.
5. **It being true** that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

-----  
C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

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## THE FATALIST ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past facts.
2. In the past, there were truths about our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the truth that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.
5. It being true that we will perform some action necessitates that we will perform that action.

-----  
C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

Like the Foreknowledge Argument, the Fatalist Argument is a serious challenge to the reality of freedom of the will.

The only changed premises are (1), (2), and (5) — and these all look plausible.

And of course one can't escape the Fatalist Argument by denying that God exists, or denying that God knows what we will do in the future. All we need is the existence of fate — of truths about the future.

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Let's turn to the question of how the believer in free will might reply to these arguments.

First, let's list the substantial assumptions which are common to **both** arguments.

There are truths about our future actions.

We have no choice about the past.

If we have no choice about some facts, and those facts necessitate X, we have no choice about X.

There is also one substantial assumption made only by the Foreknowledge Argument:

In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

Let's begin with this one, before turning to the assumptions common to both arguments.

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In the past, God  
had  
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actions.

One person who has no trouble rejecting this assumption is the atheist. If God does not exist, then God is not around to know about our future actions. So the Foreknowledge Argument is only a real challenge to free will if you think that God exists.

But could the theist deny this assumption?

One way to deny it would be to deny the existence of fate — in that case there would be no truths about our actions for God to know. I'll come back to that idea.

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In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

But there is also another way to reject this assumption, which is expressed in this quote from Aquinas:

“although contingent things become actual successively, nevertheless God knows contingent things not successively, as they are in their own being, as we do, but simultaneously. The reason is because His knowledge is measured by eternity, as is also His being; and eternity being simultaneously whole comprises all time, as said above ... Hence all things that are in time are present to God from eternity ... because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality.”

Aquinas is saying that God does not come to know things as they happen, in time; rather, God (in some sense) exists outside of time. To God, all things that happen in time are seen “in their presentiality.”

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In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

To get a grip on this, imagine that one learned of another universe, which had its own system of time and space. And suppose one was given all of the information about everything that ever happens in that universe, and the time at which it happens. So, in particular, you know everything about every free action in that universe. But it's not like you knew of every action **before** that action occurred — you don't exist in the time of that universe.

Does the claim that God exists outside of time give us reason to reject premise (2) of the foreknowledge argument?

Let's look again at the premises which make reference to time.

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In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

Let's look again at the premises which make reference to time.

1. We have no choice about past facts.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the fact that God knows that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

Does the claim that God exists outside of time give us reason to reject premise (2) of the Foreknowledge Argument?

It does look like, if Aquinas' view is right, (2) is false. That is good for the defender of free will.

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In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

It does look like, if Aquinas' view is right, (2) is false. That is good for the defender of free will.

But here is a challenge for someone who tries to get around the foreknowledge argument by adopting the view that God is outside of time. It looks like we could reformulate the relevant premises as follows:

- 1'. We have no choice about events which are **outside of time**.
- 2'. **Outside of time**, God had knowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the fact that God knows that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

And from there the argument can just go on as before. So the worry is that Aquinas' view gives us one way to block the Foreknowledge Argument, but that the argument can be easily reformulated so as to avoid the objection.

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There are truths  
about our future  
actions.

We have no  
choice about the  
past.

If we have no choice  
about A, and no  
choice about the  
connection between  
A and B, then we  
have no choice about  
B.

Let's return to the three assumptions which are common to both arguments. For now, I am going to set aside the last of these — we will come back to it next time.

Let's start by asking whether we might deny the existence of fate.

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There are truths  
about our future  
actions.

We started off with two arguments for the reality of fate.

The first was the Logical Argument for Fate, which was based on the Law of the Excluded Middle.

**The law of the excluded middle**  
For any proposition  $P$ , either  $P$  is true or  $\text{Not-}P$  is true.

But what if we denied this? Recall the two propositions about the future we discussed earlier:

You will get married  
on July 1, 2030.

You will not get married  
on July 1, 2030.

Could we say that neither of these are true (or false), but that both simply lack truth-value?

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There are truths  
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You will get married  
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You will not get married  
on July 1, 2030.

Could we say that neither of these are true (or false), but that both simply lack truth-value?

Here's a challenge to this kind of view. Suppose that you say to a friend, 'I bet Mariana is going to decide to major in philosophy.' And then suppose that, a month later, after long (free) deliberations, Mariana does indeed make the obviously correct choice and decides to major in philosophy. We would be inclined to say: 'What you said about Mariana **was** true.'

Doesn't this imply that there was already a truth about what Mariana was going to decide, back when you made the prediction?

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There are truths  
about our future  
actions.

Now consider the second argument for fate which we discussed earlier: the theological argument. This is not an argument likely to trouble an atheist. But can the theist reasonably deny that God knows our future?

This view — that God exists, but does not know our future actions — is called **open theism**.

There are two central objections to open theism.

The first is just that it amounts to a denial of God's omniscience.

But here the open theist who thinks that claims about future actions have no truth-value has a not-unreasonable reply. She can say that she is not denying God's omniscience, because she is not denying that God knows all of the truths. She is just denying that there are any truths about future actions to be known (yet).

(A tricky question is whether you can still be this kind of open theist if you think that God exists outside of time.)

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There are truths  
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There are two central objections to open theism.

The second central objection to open theism is more theological than philosophical. And this is just that it is hard to square the view that God does not know what we are going to do with certain features of the main monotheistic religions.

Various passages in both the Old and New Testaments (as well as in the Koran) seem to imply the existence of divine foreknowledge. Consider, for example the following well-known passage from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus is speaking to Peter:

“Truly, I tell you, this very night,  
before the rooster crows, you will  
deny me three times.”

One who denies divine foreknowledge seems forced into saying either that Jesus did not really know what he said to be true, or that Peter’s denial was not free.

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One who denies divine foreknowledge seems forced into saying either that Jesus did not really know what he said to be true, or that Peter’s denial was not free.

Perhaps there’s a way out. One might say that Peter’s decision was free, but that the relevant choice had already been freely made prior to Jesus’s saying this — so that the choice was free despite the action being determined at the time of Jesus’s statement.

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We have no  
choice about the  
past.

Let's turn to our last line of response to the two arguments. This is to deny the assumption, common to both arguments, that we have no choice about the past.

The denial of this assumption is often associated with William of Ockham, an English philosopher and theologian who was born about 15 years after Aquinas' death, in 1288. (He's the one that "Ockham's razor" is named after.)



To see why this might not be ridiculous, consider the overlooked philosophical problem of the incompatibility of free will and roommate belief.

It seems that sometimes, your roommate can have beliefs about what you will do; for example, the following might be true:

At 10 am today, your roommate believed that you would eat a salad for lunch.

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We have no choice about the past.

At 10 am today, your roommate believed that you would eat a salad for lunch.

Now imagine that at noon you are in the dining hall, about to grab a salad, when you are suddenly overcome with an unlikely desire for a fish sandwich. Do you have a choice about whether you will choose the salad or the fish sandwich? It seems that you do. **But then it also seems that you have a choice about whether your roommate's belief, at 10 am, was true.** After all, if you choose the fish sandwich, your roommate's belief that you would eat a salad will have been false.

If this story makes sense, it follows that you do sometimes have a choice about past facts: you had a choice about whether, in the past, a certain belief about your future actions was true.



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We have no choice about the past.

If this story makes sense, it follows that you do sometimes have a choice about past facts: you had a choice about whether, in the past, a certain belief about your future actions was true.

Of course, this does not mean that you have a choice about **every** past fact. For example, you don't now have a choice about whether it rained yesterday. But consider the sorts of "past facts" at play in the Fatalist Argument.

They are facts like this:

In 2000 BC it was true that on 6/1/2030 you will get married.

This is a fact about the past; but it is also partly about the future. It is perhaps not so hard to believe that you will have a choice in 2030 about whether in 2000 BC this was a fact.



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So perhaps Ockham's strategy of saying that we have a choice about some past facts helps with the Fatalist Argument. Does it help with the Foreknowledge Argument?

The kind of past facts at play in that argument are facts like this one:

In 2000 BC God knew that on  
6/1/2030 you will get married.



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We have no choice about the past.

So perhaps Ockham's strategy of saying that we have a choice about some past facts helps with the Fatalist Argument. Does it help with the Foreknowledge Argument?

The kind of past facts at play in that argument are facts like this one:

In 2000 BC God knew that on 6/1/2030 you will get married.

Let's return to the example about you having a choice about whether your roommate's belief was true.

In that case, you had the power to make your roommate's belief true, or make the belief false.

Will you, by analogy, have the power to make God's belief about your future actions false?



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Let's return to the example about you having a choice about whether your roommate's belief was true.

In that case, you had the power to make your roommate's belief true, or make the belief false.

Will you, by analogy, have the power to make God's belief about your future actions false?

Here the analogy appears to break down. God is (on standard views) infallible; it's impossible to make God make a mistake. So (if this is true) you couldn't have the power to make God's belief about your future actions false.

This does not show that this response to the Foreknowledge Argument fails. But it does show that we need some explanation of how it could be that in 2030 it could be up to you whether in 2000 BC God knew something.



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We've discussed two different, but related, challenges to the belief that we have free will. One is posed by fate; the other by God's knowledge of our future actions.

One can reply to both arguments by saying that there is no such thing as fate, and no such thing as divine foreknowledge. But both of those escape routes face challenges.

If you believe in free will, and accept the existence of fate and/or divine foreknowledge, you should think about what premise of the Fate and Foreknowledge Arguments you reject.

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