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Foreknowledge, Accidental Necessity, and Uncausability

Foreknowledge arguments attempt to show that infallible and exhaustive foreknowledge is incompatible with creaturely freedom. One particularly powerful foreknowledge argument employs the concept of accidental necessity.[1] But an opponent of this argument might challenge it precisely because it employs the concept of accidental necessity. Indeed, Trenton Merricks (2009, 2011) and Linda Zagzebski (2002, 2011) have each written favorably of such a response. In this paper, I aim to show that responding to the accidental necessity version of the foreknowledge argument by disputing the concept of accidental necessity, including doing so in the ways these authors do, does not constitute a successful response to the foreknowledge argument. This is because there is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument which employs the notion of uncausability rather than accidental necessity; and this argument is not threatened by objections to the concept of accidental necessity, including those objections offered by Zagzebski and Merricks. As recent literature on the foreknowledge argument has emphasized, when a response to a foreknowledge argument fails to threaten an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of that argument, the response in question is not successful. So the responses to the accidental necessity version of the foreknowledge argument I have mentioned are not successful. Moreover, those working on foreknowledge arguments more generally should take seriously the uncausability version of the foreknowledge argument articulated here, as it may well be that still more responses to the foreknowledge argument will not threaten it, either.

I begin in section one by briefly presenting the accidental necessity version of the foreknowledge argument. In section two, I show how authors have argued that various responses to this argument are unsuccessful because they fail to threaten only slightly modified versions of the argument. In section three, I explain the response to the foreknowledge argument discussed above. I show in section four that there is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument, one which employs the concept of uncausability rather than accidental necessity, and the no accidental necessity response does not threaten it. In the conclusion, I propose that even more responses to the foreknowledge argument or arguments much like it may well be unsuccessful for this same reason: there are only slightly modified but still well-motivated versions of the arguments they target which they do not threaten. In some cases, the argument they fail to threaten is the uncausability foreknowledge argument.

1 The Accidental Necessity Version of the Foreknowledge Argument

My goal in this section is to briefly present and explain the accidental necessity version of the foreknowledge argument (often hereafter "the foreknowledge argument"). As I will present it, the argument is a conditional proof of the claim that if at every past time a person has infallible

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[1] Zagzebski (1996) calls this version "the strongest version of the foreknowledge dilemma." An alternative version, which appeals to the notion of power over the past, derives from Nelson Pike (1965).

and exhaustive foreknowledge, then no action any creature ever performs is performed freely. Infallible and exhaustive foreknowledge is incompatible with creaturely freedom. For purposes of my discussion, I shall call the would-be infallible foreknower God.

Begin by assuming for conditional proof that at every past time God has infallible and exhaustive foreknowledge. I shall momentarily present an argument that, given this assumption, the arbitrarily chosen action of singing performed by an arbitrarily chosen creature Elizabeth at an arbitrarily chosen time t_{100} is not a free action. If this argument succeeds, then it follows that no creature ever performs any action freely, since Elizabeth, her act, and its time were chosen arbitrarily. Thus, by conditional proof, if God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge at every past time, then no actions by any creatures at any times are performed freely.

The argument that, given our assumption, Elizabeth's action of singing at t_{100} is not performed freely begins with the following claim, where t_1 is a time long before t_{100}:

(1) God believed at t_1 that Elizabeth will sing at t_{100}.

Claim (1) is supposed to be justified by our assumption together with uncontroversial claims about knowledge. Given our assumption that God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge at every past time, it follows that God infallibly foreknew at t_1 that Elizabeth will sing.[2] But, knowledge that p requires believing p; so, God must have believed at t_1 that Eilzabeth will sing.

Using "$\square_L$" to signify logical necessity, the second claim says:

(2) $\square_L$ $\forall$t, t', S, A (God believes at t that S does A at t' $\rightarrow$ S does A at t').

In English, (2) says that it is logically necessary that for every time t and t', creature S, and action A, if God believes at t that S does A at t' then S does A at t'. The rough idea behind claim (2) is that God's infallibility ensures that necessarily, if God believes p, then p. Thus, where p is a claim that some S does A at t, necessarily if God believes S does A at t, then S does A at t.[3]

The third claim introduces the notion of accidental necessity, symbolized as "$\square_A$". Where "<" symbolizes an earlier-than relation, it says:

(3) $\forall$t, t', x [(x obtains at t & t < t')$\rightarrow$ ($\square_A$ at t' that x obtains at t)].

In English, (3) claims that for all times t and t' and events x, if x obtains at t and t is earlier than t' then it is accidentally necessary at t' that x obtains at t. This claim is often called the "Principle of the Necessity of the Past" or the "Principle of the Fixity of the Past". The key to

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[2] Advocates of the Geachian view explored in (Todd 2011) may reject this way of supporting (1). For a criticism of Todd's support for Geachianism, see (Byerly 2012a).

[3] I say this is the rough idea because there are some who would endorse (2) but who would reject understanding infallibility as implying that for any proposition p, if God believes p at t then p. Those who would do so would be those who think that non-time-indexed claims can change their truth-values, but time-indexed claims cannot.

understanding (3) is to grasp that the concept of accidental necessity employed in it is a concept of a temporally relativized kind of necessity.[4] Accidental necessity is a property that propositions can have at some times but not others. And, the paradigmatic cases of accidental necessity are cases where a proposition about the past is necessary at later times where it wasn't necessary at earlier times. For example, there seems to be something right about claiming that, prior to April 15, 1865, it could have been that Lincoln was not shot, but nowadays it can no longer be that Lincoln was not shot. Lincoln's not having been shot on that date is not now possible, though it once was possible that he not be shot on that date. Advocates of (3) claim that this is how it is for every claim about what obtained in the past. If x obtained at a past time t, then at future times it is accidentally necessary that x obtained at t.

We are now in a position to draw the first inference of the argument:

(4) $\Box_A$ at t_{100} that God believes at t_1 that Elizabeth will sing at t_{100}.

Claim (4) follows from (1) and (3), provided that God's believing at t_1 that Elizabeth will sing at t_{100} is something that obtained at t_1.[5]

The next claim of the argument is a transfer principle connecting accidental necessity and logical necessity:

(5) $\forall p, q, t \ [(\Box_A \text{ at } t \text{ that } p \ \& \ \Box_L(p \rightarrow q)) \rightarrow \Box_A \text{ at } t \text{ that } q]$.

A good name for (5) would be the "Transfer of Accidental Necessity Principle". The idea behind (5) is that accidental necessity transfers across entailment. Roughly, if p is accidentally necessary and p entails q, then q is accidentally necessary. Support for the Transfer of Accidental Necessity Principle typically derives from the appeal of transfer of necessity principles for other kinds of necessity, such as logical necessity.

Given (5), (1), and (2), we can now infer:

(6) $\Box_A$ at t_{100} that Elizabeth sings at t_{100}.

The accidental necessity at t_{100} of God's past belief transfers across the entailment from this belief to Elizabeth's singing. Thus, Elizabeth's singing itself is accidentally necessary at t_{100}.

The final premise of the argument is a version of the principle of alternate possibilities:

(7) $\forall S, A, t \ (\Box_A \text{ at } t \text{ that } S \text{ does } A \text{ at } t \rightarrow S\text{'s doing } A \text{ at } t \text{ is not done freely})$.

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[4] See (Zagzebski 1996).

[5] In my own view, some of the most interesting responses to foreknowledge arguments are ones which might be charitably interpreted as rejecting the assumption here that God's belief occurs in the past, not because they hold to timelessness but because they hold that divine beliefs (or other mental states) occur only cross-temporally. See, e.g., (Zemach and Widerker 1987).

I like to call (7) the principle of alternate accidental possibilities. Its support derives in part from the attraction of principles of alternate possibilities governing free action and responsibility more generally.[6]

From (6) and (7) we can now infer:

(8) Elizabeth's singing at t_{100} is not done freely.

With (8) we can complete our conditional proof. Given our assumption that God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge at every past time, we have seen that it follows that Elizabeth's singing at t_{100} is not done freely. But, since Elizabeth, her singing, and t_{100} were all chosen arbitrarily, it will follow from our assumption that no creature's action at any time is ever done freely. Infallible foreknowledge and creaturely freedom are incompatible. Or so argues the advocate of the accidental necessity version of the foreknowledge argument.

2 Evaluating Responses to the Foreknowledge Argument

Even the quick presentation of the foreknowledge argument in the previous section is enough to show that it has considerable power. How, then, might one go about responding to it? Good question; but answering this question is not my primary concern here. Rather, what I am interested in is ways in which responses to the argument are themselves evaluated. What does it take for a response to the accidental necessity version of the foreknowledge argument to be successful?

One necessary condition on a successful response to the foreknowledge argument has been made especially clear in recent discussions. It is not enough for a response to this foreknowledge argument to be successful that it simply offers reason for thinking that a premise in the argument is false. For, there may be an only slightly modified version of the foreknowledge argument which this response does not threaten at all, where this modified version has roughly as much going for it as does the original argument. In order for a response R to constitute a successful response to the foreknowledge argument, it cannot be that R fails to threaten an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument.

Perhaps the clearest example of an author using this criterion of success to evaluate a response to the foreknowledge argument is Linda Zagzebski's (2012) recent discussion of the timelessness (or Boethian) solution to the foreknowledge argument. This solution responds to the argument by rejecting claim (1) from section one. This claim, recall, requires that God believes

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[6] For an overview of the principle of alternate possibilities, see (Widerker and McKenna 2006).

at t_1 that Elizabeth sings at t_{100}. The advocate of the timelessness solution claims that God is not in time, has no properties at any times, and so does not have any beliefs at times, including t_1.[7]

Zagzebski is not impressed by this timelessness solution to the foreknowledge argument. It is not that she thinks that divine timelessness itself is problematic. Rather, she thinks that there is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument to which the timelessness solution cannot offer a response by itself. That version of the foreknowledge argument replaces the claims in the original foreknowledge argument which speak of God's holding beliefs at times with claims which speak of God's holding beliefs timelessly. Thus, for instance, (1), (2), and (3) are to be replaced with (1*), (2*), and (3*):

(1*) God believes timelessly that Elizabeth will sing at t_{100}.
(2*) $\Box_L$ $\forall t$, t', S, A (God believes timelessly that S does A at t' $\rightarrow$ S does A at t').
(3*) $\forall t$, x [(x obtains timelessly) $\rightarrow$ ($\Box_A$ at t that x obtains timelessly)].

These claims, together with (5) and (7) from section one, will be enough to generate the conclusion necessary for the foreknowledge argument. And nothing about the timelessness solution by itself poses any threat to these claims or to (5) or (7). Further, these claims have roughly as much going for them as do the parallel claims in the original argument. This is not to say that the resulting argument faces no problems. It is simply to say that whatever problems it faces are not simply the problem that it conflicts with divine timelessness. Thus, the timelessness response is unsuccessful, Zagzebski argues, because it does not threaten an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument.

Other authors, too, have attacked the timelessness solution in similar ways.[8] They have argued, for example, that instead of using claims about temporal divine beliefs we can use claims about infallible prophetic utterances or divine inscriptions. One way to understand these criticisms of the timelessness solution is that they are offering yet another way of showing that, even if the timeless view is correct, it does not constitute a successful response to the foreknowledge argument. The reason it does not is that there is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of that argument which is not challenged by the thesis of divine timelessness itself.

One last example of this pattern of evaluation comes from discussion of what one might call the divine belieflessness response to the foreknowledge argument.[9] This response rejects (1) not because it holds that God's beliefs are timeless, but because it holds that God has no beliefs to begin with. One way of criticizing this response has been to argue that, even if God doesn't

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[7] For a recent defense, see (Rota 2010).

[8] E.g., (van Inwagen 2008).

[9] See (Alston 1986).

have beliefs, God must have some kind of mental state whereby he knows what he knows.[10] And, the foreknowledge argument can be revised using those mental states rather than beliefs. Again, this is not to say that there will not be a problem with the resulting revised argument. It is just that the belieflessness solution by itself is not enough. Like the timelessness solution, it is such that it does not threaten an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument. And in this way it is unsuccessful.

3 The No Accidental Necessity Response

In the previous section, we learned of a constraint governing successful responses to the foreknowledge argument. To be successful, a response must not be such that it fails to threaten an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument. My primary aim in this paper is to use this constraint to show that a response to the foreknowledge argument which casts doubt on the concept of accidental necessity is not a successful response to the foreknowledge argument. It is in this section and the next that I aim to demonstrate this. I begin in this section by explaining the no accidental necessity response.

Philosophers have often been tempted to respond to the foreknowledge argument by denying claim (3), the principle of the necessity of the past. Recall that this claim says:

(3) $\forall t, t', x$ [(x obtains at t & t < t')→ ($\square_A$ at t' that x obtains at t)].

One approach to denying (3) is to do so because one thinks that there is at least one x such that x obtained at a time t and at a time t' later than t it is not accidentally necessary that x obtained at t. Advocates of this approach are often called "Ockhamists."[11]

But there is a second way of denying (3). For, one might think that there just is no such thing as accidental necessity. Two prominent authors on the foreknowledge debate have recently made comments which favor just such a response to the foreknowledge argument. And, whether or not these authors would ultimately affirm such an approach to the foreknowledge argument or affirm such an approach all by itself, the approach itself is worthy of consideration for precisely the reasons these authors offer for it. What I want to show in this paper, nonetheless, is that defending such a view is not enough for a response to the foreknowledge argument, since the foreknowledge argument can be restated using the concept of uncausability rather than accidental necessity and the restated argument will not be threatened by what these authors have said on behalf of this response to the foreknowledge argument. Anyone inclined to endorse the no accidental necessity response to the foreknowledge argument must find more to say than what these authors have said, and it is not clear that there is more to say.

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[10] (Zagzebski 2011) presses this line.

[11] E.g., see (Adams 1967).

My first example of the no-accidental necessity response to the foreknowledge argument comes from Linda Zagzebski (2011). She writes, "It is worth asking . . . whether there is any such thing as the necessity of the past at all."[12] And she argues that there is not any such thing. Nothing can fulfill the role that accidental necessity is supposed to play in the foreknowledge argument. I'll do my best to represent her argument here.

To understand Zagzebski's argument, a brief comment about "uncausability" and "temporally asymmetric necessity" is in order. To say that the past is uncausable is just to say that for any times t and t', if t is earlier than t', then at t' every event at t is uncausable—i.e., at t', nobody can cause it. A bit more awkwardly, we can talk of a proposition p's being uncausable when what p reports to obtain or not to obtain is uncausable in the previous sense. On the other hand, to say that there is a temporally asymmetric necessity is to say that there is a necessity which facts about the past have just because they are facts about the past, but that facts about the future do not have just because they are about the future. Given these explanatory comments, I think we can fairly represent Zagzebski's argument that nothing can fulfill the role that accidental necessity is supposed to fulfill in the foreknowledge argument as follows:

(9) If there is something that fulfills the role that accidental necessity is supposed to play in the foreknowledge argument, then it—accidental necessity—is either uncausability or it is temporally asymmetrical necessity.

(10) If accidental necessity is uncausability, then the transfer of accidental necessity principle is false.

(11) But part of the function of accidental necessity in the foreknowledge argument is to help make true the transfer of accidental necessity principle.

(12) If accidental necessity is temporally asymmetric necessity, then the past is accidentally necessary just because it is past.

(13) The past is not accidentally necessary just because it is past.

(14) So, there is nothing that fulfills the role that accidental necessity is supposed to play in the foreknowledge argument.

Let me make a few comments to defend this interpretation.

First, in favor of (9), Zagzebski writes, "If there is a distinct kind of necessity that the past has qua past, and which is not an implicit reference to the lack of causability of the past, then it is temporally asymmetrical." This is just a conditional form of the disjunction in (9).

In favor of (10), Zagzebski offers some powerful counterexamples to the principle which results from replacing accidental necessity in the transfer of accidental necessity principle with uncausability. Replacing accidental necessity with uncausability in that principle yields roughly:

(15) $\forall p, q, t$ [(it is uncausable at t that p & $\Box_L(p \to q)) \to$ it is uncausable at t that q]

But, as Zagzebski writes, this transfer principle is "false because the truth of q may be a logically necessary condition for the truth of p, where p is not causable but q is causable. For example, p might be the proposition that I build a 200 story building by myself, a proposition that is causally but not logically impossible. The proposition that I build a 200 story building by myself entails that I build a building. The proposition that I build a building (a small one, with help) is causable." Thus, (10) is secure. Since (11) is obvious, it follows that uncausability cannot fulfill the role of accidental necessity in the foreknowledge argument.

But accidental necessity cannot be temporally asymmetric necessity, either. For, (12) is true by definition: if accidental necessity is temporally asymmetric necessity, then the past must be necessary just because it is past. But, Zagzebski argues in favor of (13)—that the past is not accidentally necessary just because it is past. In favor of this she says "What do we mean when we say that the past, the strict past, is necessary? When people say 'There is no use crying over spilled milk,' they presumably mean that there is nothing anybody can do now about the spilled milk; the spilling of the milk is outside of the realm of our causal control. But, it is not at all clear that pastness per se puts something outside the realm of our causal control." If the past is "necessary" in the sense that accidental necessity is supposed to capture, then it is not the case that the past is necessary just because it is past. But, if accidental necessity were temporally asymmetrical necessity, the past would be necessary just because it is past. So, accidental necessity cannot be temporally asymmetric necessity.

The foregoing is a charitable reconstruction of Zagzebski's rejection of the notion of accidental necessity. By rejecting this notion, she rejects the principle of the necessity of the past in the foreknowledge argument. What I want to show in section four below is that her doing so does not constitute a successful response to the foreknowledge argument, because there is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the argument which will not be threatened by anything in her argument above.

Before showing how that modified version of the foreknowledge argument goes, however, I want to offer one more example of this same kind of response to the foreknowledge argument—the response which denies that there is anything such as accidental necessity. Trenton Merricks (2009, 2011a), too, speaks favorably of such an approach.

Merricks's proximate target is fatalistic arguments (arguments for the conclusion that nobody has any choice about anything) which begin with a premise of the form

(16) Person S has no choice about X.

What goes for X in (16) is either a claim that some proposition about what S will do was true in the distant past or a claim that God believed some proposition about what S will do in the distant past.

Merricks argues that fatalistic arguments that begin with a premise with the form of (16) without arguing for this premise beg the question. But, he acknowledges that most fatalistic arguments do not just begin with a premise with the form of (16); rather, most fatalistic arguments appeal to some kind of claim about accidental necessity or the fixity of the past and use this claim to support their premise of the form (16). He is happy to grant that such arguments do not beg the question. He does, however, have a different criticism of such arguments.

Merricks says that "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 (2009: 42)." He considers three ways in which the past plausibly is necessary. It is necessary in that it is such that nobody now has a choice about it. It is necessary in that nobody can change it. And, it is necessary in that events in the past cannot be caused. But that the past is necessary in any of these ways, Merricks insists, does not give us a reason to think that nobody has any choice about what the past was like. More specifically and more importantly in the present context, it does not supply a reason to think that nobody has any choice about what God believed in the past. And if it does not, then the no accidental necessity strategy is supported. For, one of the functions that accidental necessity is supposed to play in the foreknowledge argument is it is supposed to support the claim that if S's doing A at t is accidentally necessary at t, then S's doing A at t is not done freely. This claim is arguably based on the more general idea that the realm of the accidentally necessary is beyond the grip of our free exercise. Thus, if we identify freedom with having a choice, as Merricks is happy to do, then it will follow that one of the functions of accidental necessity is that it is supposed to support the claim that nobody has a choice about what is accidentally necessary. Accordingly, if the only plausible ways in which the past is accidentally necessary fail to deliver the result that no one now has a choice about the past, as Merricks contends, then there is no plausible way in which the past is accidentally necessary which fulfills the function that accidental necessity is supposed to fulfill. In other words, the no accidental necessity response is vindicated.

Why does Merricks say that none of the three plausible ways in which the past might be accidentally necessary provides a reason for thinking that nobody has a choice about the past? The first two cases are simple. That the past is accidentally necessary in the sense that nobody has a choice about it doesn't provide a reason for thinking that nobody has a choice about the past—since the claim that nobody has a choice about the past "cannot be a reason for itself (2009: 40)." And, that the past is accidentally necessary in the sense that nobody can change it does not provide a reason to think that nobody has a choice about it, since nobody can change the future but this doesn't supply a reason for thinking that nobody has a choice about the future. The third case, that of uncausability, is more complicated and it takes us straight to the heart of Merricks's larger attack on fatalistic arguments. For, it presumes the success of an important part of that attack.

As with the first two approaches to identifying accidental necessity, Merricks argues that if accidental necessity is uncausability, then the past's being accidentally necessary provides no

reason for thinking that nobody has a choice about God's past beliefs. He defends this claim by arguing that a person can have a choice about God's past beliefs without causing them. His argument for this can be stated simply, as follows. Suppose Jones sits at t. And suppose that at a time t_0 a thousand years before t God believes that Jones will sit at t. Merricks proposes that Jones can have a choice about God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t since Jones has a choice about that on which God's belief depends—namely, Jones's sitting at t. But, if this is how Jones has a choice about God's belief at t_0, then Jones needn't cause God's belief at t_0. So, the fact that the past is accidentally necessary in the sense that it is uncausable does not provide a reason to think that nobody has a choice about God's past beliefs. Indeed, there is no plausible account of accidental necessity according to which the past's being accidentally necessary provides a reason to think that nobody has a choice about God's past beliefs. In other words, the no accidental necessity response is vindicated.

I want to close this section by emphasizing that Zagzebski's and Merricks's approaches to advocating the no accidental necessity response to the foreknowledge argument needn't be appropriated by everyone interested in that response. Their own defenses of the strategy differ significantly, especially when it comes to ruling out the option of identifying accidental necessity with uncausability. My main goal in this paper is simply to argue that someone who objects to the notion of accidental necessity, no matter how plausibly, has not thereby offered a successful response to the foreknowledge argument. I complete my argument for this claim in the next section by showing that there is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the foreknowledge argument which will not be threatened by the fact that there is no such thing as accidental necessity. But, I intend for my argument to catch Zagzebski and Merricks just as well as someone who objects to accidental necessity for some other reason. So, I will argue in the next section in particular that their comments in favor of the no accidental necessity response do not successfully threaten the version of the foreknowledge argument I develop. A successful response to the foreknowledge argument calls for more.

4 The Uncausability Foreknowledge Argument

I'll begin this section by presenting my uncausability version of the foreknowledge argument. It should be quite clear that the bare fact that there is no such thing as accidental necessity, if that is a fact, does not threaten the argument. This is simply because the notion of accidental necessity is nowhere employed in the argument. After presenting the argument, I will argue in addition that neither Zagzebski's nor Merricks's remarks in favor of the no accidental necessity response to the accidental necessity foreknowledge argument provide a sufficient reason for rejecting the uncausability foreknowledge argument.

The key differences between the accidental necessity foreknowledge argument and my uncausability foreknowledge argument are in what the arguments claim about the nature of the past, the entailment principles used in these arguments, and what the arguments claim about the nature of free action. Whereas the accidental necessity argument claims that the past is

accidentally necessary, the uncausability foreknowledge argument claims that the past is uncausable. Whereas the accidental necessity argument employs a transfer of accidental necessity principle, the uncausability argument employs a removal of causabilities principle. And, whereas the accidental necessity argument claims that free action requires alternate accidental possibilities, the uncasability argument claims that alternate causabilities are necessary for free action. The remainder of the arguments is the same.

Where "$\Box_C$" symbolizes it is uncausable that, we can present the uncausability foreknowledge argument as follows:

(1) God believed at t_1 that Elizabeth will sing at t_{100}.

(2) $\Box_L \forall t, t', S, A$ (God believes at t that S does A at t' $\rightarrow$ S does A at t').

(3*) $\forall t, t', x$ [(x obtains at t & t < t') $\rightarrow$ ($\Box_C$ at t' that x obtains at t)].

(4) $\Box_C$ at t_{100} that God believes at t_1 that Elizabeth will sing at t_{100}. (1,3)

(5*) $\forall x, y, t, t', t''$ [(x obtains at t & $\Box_C$ at t' (x obtains at t) & $\Box_L$(x obtains at t $\rightarrow$ y obtains at t'')) $\rightarrow$ $\Box_C$ at t' (~(y obtains at t''))].

(6) $\Box_C$ at t_{100} that Elizabeth does other than sing at t_{100}. (1,2,4,5)

(7*) $\forall S, A, t$ ($\Box_C$ at t (S does other than A) $\rightarrow$ S does not do A freely at t).

(8) Elizabeth does not sing freely at t_{100}. (6,7)

Since Elizabeth, her singing, and t_{100} are all chosen arbitrarily, the argument can go to show that if God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge, then no creature ever performs any action freely. I'll offer some brief comments about the unique premises of the argument.

The first unique premise is (3*), what we might call the uncausability of the past. The kinds of motivations which motivate the accidental necessity of the past tend to motivate the uncausability of the past as much if not more, as we have already said. Both Merricks and Zagzebski take seriously the idea that accidental necessity just is uncausability; and this can be seen as evidence in favor of (3*).

The second unique premise is (5*), what we might call the principle of the removal of causabilities. In English, this premise says that for all events x and y, all times t, t', and t'', if x obtains at t and it is uncausable at t' that x obtains at t and necessarily if x obtains at t then y obtains at t'' then it is uncausable at t' that it not be the case that y obtains at t''. The intuitive idea here is that when an event is the consequence of events over which we have no causal control, we cannot cause anything other than that event to occur. In this way, (5*) is closely akin to the Beta principles often used in presentations of consequence-style arguments for incompatibilism about free will and causal determinism.[13] Those principles too are based on the

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[13] For a review of such principles, see (O'Connor 2000).

idea that the consequences of what is beyond our control are also beyond our control. Where we spell out control as it often is in the presentation of consequence-style arguments as a kind of two-way power, this idea is extremely close to (5*). For, one way to understand this two-way power is just two-way causability.[14] And it is precisely such two-way causability which (5*) says we lack with respect to events which are the consequence of what is uncausable. Thus, to the extent that Beta-type principles are plausible, (5*) has much to be said in its favor.

And so does (7*). At least, given the plausibility of (7), (7*) has much going for it. For, what is it for an agent to be able to do otherwise if not for her to be able to cause something else to occur? It is true that certain incompatibilists, those who are adherents of a non-causal theory of free action, may not be as attracted to (7*) as to (7).[15] For, they will say that to be able to do otherwise has nothing to do with being able to cause anything. I am not a fan of this theory of free action myself, for reasons offered by O'Connor and Jacobs (2013). But, I will not go into this here. I will only say that to adopt a non-causal theory of free action is surely something over and above disputing the notion of accidental necessity. And it is certainly not something said by Zagzebski or Merricks in their comments favoring the no accidental necessity response. Thus, this sort of move would only prove my point here that the no accidental necessity response to the foreknowledge argument is incomplete.

With (3*), (5*), and (7*) in place, the uncausability argument trots on just as well as the accidental necessity argument. And it should be perfectly clear that the bare fact that there is no such thing as accidental necessity does not threaten this argument. For, it says not a word of accidental necessity. Further, as I shall now argue, the argument is not shown to fail by anything Zagzebski or Merricks defend in the course of their advocacy of the no accidental necessity response.

Take Zagzebski's defense of the no accidental necessity response first. In defense of the claim that nothing can play the role that accidental necessity plays in the foreknowledge argument, Zagzebski offers critical comments about two modalities—a temporally asymmetric modality and the modality of uncausability.

Zagzebski's critical remarks about temporally asymmetric modalities will pose no threat to the uncausability foreknowledge argument. This is because it is no part of this argument that there is any such modality. Nor will Zagzebski's critical remarks about uncausability pose a threat to the uncausability foreknowledge argument. For, what Zagzebski claims about uncausability is just that it cannot be used as a substitute for accidental necessity in the principle of the transitivity of accidental necessity. In other words, she disputes the claim that if p is uncausable and p entails q, then q is uncausable. But, perspicuously, the uncausability argument above does not employ such a transfer of uncausability principle. Rather, it employs a removal of

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[14] For a reflection on two-way power and causation in this vein, see (Lowe 2013).

[15] See, e.g., (McCann 2012) and (Goetz 2000).

causabilities principle. And, this principle is not threatened by the counterexamples Zagzebski proposes against the transfer of uncausability principle.

Merricks's comments have a more significant chance of threatening the uncausability argument. For, he argues against a claim which is plausibly entailed by what I said above on behalf of claim (7*) of the uncausability argument. Specifically, he argues against the following claim: the past's being uncausable supplies a good reason for thinking that persons do not have a choice about God's past beliefs. This claim is arguably entailed by what I said on behalf of premise (7*). For, suppose that the past is uncausable (i.e., that (3*) is true). And suppose that God has past beliefs about what persons will do (e.g., suppose that (1) is true). It follows that God's past beliefs are uncausable. But, now, in defense of claim (7*) I said that this claim was justified in part by the idea that uncausable events are beyond our control—that we aren't able to exercise control over what is uncausable. Thus, it follows that if the past is uncausable, then God's past beliefs are beyond our control—i.e., we have no choice about them. Insofar as commitment to the soundness of this argument implies commitment to the claim that the past's being uncausable supplies a good reason for thinking that persons do not have a choice about God's beliefs, Merricks's arguing against this latter claim poses a threat to the advocate of the uncausability argument.

Thankfully, however, what Merricks says against the claim that the past's being uncausable supplies a good reason for thinking that persons do not have a choice about God's past beliefs is quite unconvincing. In section three, we saw that Merricks argues against this claim by arguing that a person can have a choice about God's past beliefs without there being any backward causation. He argues first, as follows, that a person can have a choice about God's past beliefs:

(17) Jones has a choice about Jones's sitting at t.
(18) God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends upon Jones's sitting at t.
(19) If S has a choice about that on which God's belief b depends, then S has a choice about God's belief b.
(20) So, Jones has a choice about God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t.

Merricks then argues that the way in which Jones has a choice about God's past beliefs here does not require backward causation.

I object that Merricks's argument that Jones has a choice about God's past belief is not sufficiently well-defended, insofar as it is defended at all. For, Merricks either says nothing in defense of the claim that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t or what he says on its behalf is unconvincing.

Insofar as Merricks says something on behalf of the claim that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t, it is the following[16]:

> My objection to [the foreknowledge 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.' 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 (2009: 52).

I see three ways to interpret the passage. But none will supply an adequate defense of the claim that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t.

On the first reading of the passage, Merricks is simply voicing his agreement with Origen. The passage should be read as follows: "Origen says p. And so do I." If we take the passage in this way, and it is not clear that we should not, then Merricks is not intending to offer a defense of the claim that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t. He is just saying that he (and Origen) thinks this is true. Of course, that is not an adequate defense of the claim. So, on this interpretation, Merricks has not provided an adequate defense of a claim in his argument which would threaten the uncausability foreknowledge argument. And this claim, as we will see momentarily, is certainly in need of a defense.

On the second reading, Merricks is offering an argument from authority. "Origen says p. So, p." But while this interpretation will provide a defense of the claim that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t, it will not provide an adequate defense. The same kind of argument from authority could be championed by advocates of any number of responses to the foreknowledge argument, and the defender of the foreknowledge argument will hardly be impressed.

The final interpretation is to take Merricks as offering a defense of the claim that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t in the form of a disjunctive syllogism, as follows:

(21) Either God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t or Jones's sitting at t depends on God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t.

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[16] For simplicity's sake here, I overlook a slightly different argument Merricks offers for the same conclusion on p.54 which makes a similar mistake as that made by the argument discussed in the main text. The alternative argument depends on the claim that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on the truth at t_0 of the proposition <Jones will sit at t>. This claim is no more adequately defended than is the claim discussed in the main text that God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t.

(22) It is not the case that Jones's sitting at t depends on God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t.

(23) So, God's belief at t_0 that Jones will sit at t depends on Jones's sitting at t.

Here we get a defense of the central claim in need of defense. And it is an argumentative defense that is more than an argument from authority. Unfortunately, it commits the fallacy of a false dilemma.[17] For, there are other options besides God's belief at t_0 depending on Jones's sitting at t and Jones's sitting at t depending on God's belief at t_0; and some of these options have figured saliently into historical and contemporary discussions of the foreknowledge argument.[18] In particular, there is the option according to which both God's belief at t_0 and Jones's sitting at t depend on something about the world at t_0 (other than God's belief itself).

What could it be about the world at t_0 upon which both God's belief at t_0 and Jones's sitting at t could depend? Perhaps the best candidate here is total facts about the spatiotemporal world at t_0 together with the laws governing that world. Or perhaps it is, to borrow a phrase from Merricks (2011b) himself, the world's "subjunctive aspect" at t_0 of being such that were Jones to encounter the circumstances which will in fact precede his sitting, he would sit together with God's determination at t_0 to bring those circumstances about. Or perhaps it is something else still. Regardless of what exactly it might be, this entire category of options has been overlooked in Merricks's discussion. That is quite a false dilemma indeed! So, what Merricks says in defense of the no accidental necessity strategy is insufficient to threaten the uncausability argument. Worse still (though this is not my central interest here), what we've seen here is that Merricks's larger project when it comes to the foreknowledge argument is in significant jeopardy. And this is not because, as Fischer and Tognazzini (forthcoming) have maintained, Merricks's helping himself to the claim that Jones has a choice about his sitting at t is problematic.[19] Rather, it is because of his completely inadequate defense of a claim these authors mistakenly say "seem[s] just fine (11)"—the claim that God's belief at t_0 depends on Jones's sitting at t.

Let me briefly summarize the take-away for this section and the main lesson I hope this paper teaches us. The uncausability foreknowledge argument is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of the accidental necessity foreknowledge argument. But, a bare rejection of the notion of accidental necessity will not threaten the uncausability foreknowledge argument. Nor will the comments made by Zagzebski and Merricks in their support of the accidental necessity strategy threaten the uncausability foreknowledge argument. Thus, there is good reason

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[17] A similar problem seems to be at work in (McCall 2011) and (Westphal 2011)

[18] See especially (Byerly 2012b).

[19] For my part, I think Fischer and Tognazzini overlook another charitable reinterpretation of Merricks's argument according to which it is not rhetorically infelicitous. Rather than thinking of Merricks as responding to an argument for fatalism, see Merricks as responding to an argument for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and freedom. If we think of Merricks's work in this context, then his helping himself to the claim that Jones has a choice about his sitting is not ipso facto rhetorically problematic.

to think that the no accidental necessity response to the accidental necessity foreknowledge argument is unsuccessful, given the standard for successful responses to the foreknowledge argument explained in section two. Furthermore, given that the uncausability foreknowledge argument is well-motivated, it should be of general interest to philosophers working on the topic of freedom and foreknowledge.

5 Evaluating Other Responses to Foreknowledge Arguments

Part of what has motivated my interest in the present project is the general criterion of success on responses to foreknowledge arguments discussed in section two. According to that criterion, a response to a foreknowledge argument is not successful if there is an only slightly modified but still well-motivated version of that foreknowledge argument which is not threatened by the response in question. We've seen so far that Boethian (i.e., timelessness) solutions, beliefslessness solutions, and accidental necessity solutions to the foreknowledge argument arguably run afoul of this criterion. We might ask whether there are further responses that do as well. In this concluding section, I briefly explain how one might argue that more paradigmatic Ockhamist responses, so-called "Molinist" responses, and Augustinian responses to foreknowledge arguments are also unsuccessful, given the criterion in question.

Take first more paradigmatic Ockhamist responses. These responses object to whatever claim is used in a foreknowledge argument to express the principle of the necessity of the past or the principle of the fixity of the past. And, they do so by proposing counterexamples to these principles, and arguing that the principles do not apply to God's past beliefs. Can one argue that there are only slightly modified but still well-motivated versions of the foreknowledge arguments targeted by these paradigmatic Ockhamist responses which are not threatened by what Ockhamists say against these principles? Perhaps so. Indeed, it is not implausible that the uncausability argument articulated in this paper provides an example. However plausible it may be to claim that past divine beliefs are not accidentally necessary or not fixed, it will arguably be less plausible that past divine beliefs are causable. Ockhamists may even explicitly grant that they are not.[20] But, if so, then such Ockhamists will need something besides their Ockhamism to have a successful response to the foreknowledge arguments they target, given the availability of the uncausability foreknowledge argument above.

Move to so-called "Molinist" responses. Though "Molinism" is best reserved as the name for a particular view about the mechanics of divine foreknowledge and providence,[21] it is sometimes (and not entirely unfelicitously) used to name a response to foreknowledge arguments which challenges the transfer of necessity principle within them.[22] It is far from clear that what is said on behalf of these responses will threaten versions of the foreknowledge argument like the

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[20] See, e.g., (Plantinga 1986).

[21] As, e.g., in (Flint 1998).

[22] See, e.g., (Warfield 2010), (Byerly 2011) and (Jäger 2012)

uncausability foreknowledge argument which do not employ such transfer principles. Thus, again, there is reason to think that these "Molinist" responses, too, may well not be successful by our criterion.

Finally, there is good reason to think that Augustinian responses to foreknowledge arguments are not successful, given our criterion. These responses tend to target the principle in foreknowledge arguments corresponding to the principle of alternate possibilities. As advocates of the Augustinian response will point out, there are some powerful arguments that the principle of alternate possibilities fails.[23] It can be the case that S does A freely even if S couldn't have not done A. These responses to the foreknowledge argument are problematic if they are wielded by the hands of libertarians about free will, however, as they sometimes are.[24] For, while there are libertarians who think that S can freely do A though S couldn't have not done A, there are not libertarians who think that S can freely do A though S couldn't have done anything other than A in precisely the way that S did.[25] But, foreknowledge arguments like those discussed in this paper can be reformulated to show that if God has exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge, then no person could have done anything other than to do what she did in exactly the way that she did it. For, besides knowing what we will do, a God with exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge also knows in exactly what way we will do what we will do.

There is reason, then, to think that objections to the foreknowledge argument which challenge the likes of premises (1), (3), (5), and (7) are each unsuccessful because they run afoul of the criterion of success presumed throughout this paper. Said a bit differently, there is reason to think that Boethian, Ockhamist, Molinist, and Augustinian responses to the foreknowledge argument are all unsuccessful given the constraint on success discussed in section two.

One might begin to wonder at this point, if one had not already begun to do so, whether there are any successful responses to the foreknowledge argument. I say that's a good thing to wonder about.

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[23] Again, see (Widerker and McKenna 2006).

[24] E.g., (Stump 2001), (Zagzebski 1996, 2000), and (Hunt 1999, 2000).

[25] For helpful discussion of roughly this point which does not apply it to the foreknowledge debate, see (Timpe 2006).

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