

JUDGMENT DAY

THE JESUITS USED TO SAY that if you gave them a child until he was seven, they would give you a lifelong Christian. When religious stories and doctrines are learned at an early enough age, they become perceived as common knowledge. That is why Orthodox doctrine would not be convincing to an adult raised in the Hindu tradition (and, conversely, why the Hindu sacred texts would rarely convince an adult raised in the Jewish or Christian traditions). The variety of subtle ways in which the Orthodox arguments beg the question are far more transparent to a person raised outside the tradition than they are to a person raised within it.

One reason that begging the question—the fallacy of assuming, directly or indirectly, the conclusion to be proven—is such a seductive trap in a discussion of biblical texts is that the stories in those texts are so familiar that we easily mistake them for common knowledge. Everyone knows that Jericho was a great walled city before it was conquered by the Israelites. That *must* be historical fact, recorded somewhere else besides the Bible. So, given this ostensible fact, how can we possibly account for the city's conquest by a primitive, untested army unless it was with God's miraculous intervention? Doesn't this give us proof, or at least strong evidence, that an actual miracle occurred? The answer, of course, is no.

We easily overlook the undeniable fact that, when it comes to all