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Logical and Theological Fatalism

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1 Introduction

Fatalism is the thesis that no one acts freely, where:

(FA) Agent *S* freely performs act *A* at time $t =_{df}$. (i) *S* performs *A* at t and (ii) for some time t^- such that $t^- \neq t$, it is up to *S* at t^- whether *S* performs *A* at t

and:

(UP) It is up to *S* at t^- whether *S* performs *A* at $t =_{df}$. *S* at t^- is both (a) able to perform *A* at t and (b) able to refrain from performing *A* at t ,

so that (FA) is equivalent to:

(FA*) Agent *S* freely performs act *A* at time $t =_{df}$. (i) *S* performs *A* at t and (ii) for some time t^- such that $t^- \neq t$, *S* at t^- is both (a) able to perform *A* at t and (b) able to refrain from performing *A* at t .

This definition presupposes a *leeway* rather than a *source* theory of free action: according to leeway theorists, free action “requires alternative possibilities”; source theorists, by contrast, contend that if an agent is (in some relevant sense) the *source* of an action, the agent acts freely even if she lacks alternative possibilities.¹ As the ensuing discussion ought to make clear, the debate over fatalism arises only if a leeway theory of free action is presupposed.

Some leeway theorists will balk at a definition of free action according to which the time at which an agent is “able to do otherwise” is necessarily distinct from the time at which the agent acts freely.² In order to address their concern, it will be useful to consider the notion of a *time*. Following Finch and Rea (2008), I acknowledge that times might be thought of either as *abstract* states of affairs³ or as *concrete* events, and I offer that “Abstract times might

fruitfully be thought of as *present-tense maximal state of affairs*.” In defining this notion, they stipulate that:

[A] state of affairs [O] is *future-directed* just in case either [O]’s obtaining entails that some contingent thing will exist or [O]’s obtaining entails that no contingent thing will exist; [a] *past-directed* state of affairs [is defined] in the obviously parallel way. Then a state of affairs [O] is present-tense maximal if and only if, for every atomic state of affairs [O’] that is neither future-directed nor past-directed, either [O] includes [O’] or [O] precludes [O’].⁴(10)

And that:

One state of affairs includes another just in case the obtaining of the first state of affairs entails the obtaining of the second. One state of affairs precludes another just in case the obtaining of the first entails that the second does not obtain. (10, fn. 11)

Finch and Rea add that “A concrete time might then be thought of as the event of some particular abstract state of affairs obtaining” (10). In what follows, I will use the term *time* to refer to present-tense maximal concrete events. However, it should be clear that nothing of substance hinges on using this term in this way;⁵ for the purposes of this essay, what matters is that present-tense maximal concrete events do, in fact, occur.

Indeed, at the moment, what matters is that, given the definition of *S*’s freely performing *A* at *t*, *t* is a present-tense maximal concrete event that includes *S*’s performing *A*. In order to see *why* this should matter, let us consider, first, that it seems uncontroversial to assume that:

(Able) *S* at *t*- is able to perform *A* at *t*.

entails:

(Possible) It is possible⁶ that: (i) *t*- occurs and (ii) *S* performs *A* at *t*.

And, by extension, it seems uncontroversial that if *S* at *t*- is *able to* refrain from performing *A* at *t*, it is (broadly logically) *possible that* (i) *t*- occurs and (iii) *S* refrains from performing *A* at *t*. But given the preceding definition of a time, and given that (*ex hypothesi*) *t* includes *S*’s performing *A*, it follows that it is (broadly logically) *impossible that* (iv) *t* occurs and (iii) *S* refrains from performing *A* at *t*. It follows, in other words, that if *S* at *t*- is both able to perform *A* at *t* and able to refrain from performing *A* at *t*, *t* ≠ *t*.

Having specified the relevant definition of free action, I can move on to distinguishing between logical and theological fatalism. According to *logical fatalism*, the thesis that no one acts freely is entailed by the definition of free action and the logical principle of *bivalence*, which is the thesis that:

(Bivalence) For any proposition *p*, either *p* is true or *p* is false and *p* is not both true and false. (i.e., every proposition has exactly one truth value and there are no truth values other than *truth* and *falsity*.)

The pith of the argument for logical fatalism is this:

Every proposition is either true or false. Suppose that the proposition <Agent *S* performs act *A* at time *t*> is true. If this proposition is *ever* true, it is *always* true. And if this proposition is *always* true, there is never a time at which it is up to *S* whether it is true or false. (Indeed, if this proposition is *always* true, it is true long before *S* comes into existence and, hence, long before *S* is able to do anything at all.) But if there is never a time at which it is up to *S* whether <Agent *S* performs act *A* at time *t*> is true or false, *S* does not freely perform *A* at *t*. Since this point generalizes to any agent, any act, and any time, free action is impossible.

According to *theological fatalism*, the thesis that no one acts freely is entailed by the definition of free action and the existence of an essentially omniscient God, where the definition of *essential omniscience* entails the truth of bivalence:

(EDO) God is essentially omniscient =_{df.} For any proposition p , (i) either God knows that p is true or God knows that p is false, (ii) God knows that p is not both true and false, and (iii) it is impossible⁷ for God to be mistaken about the truth value of any proposition.⁸

Here is the pith of the argument for theological fatalism (which is sometimes called “the problem of freedom and foreknowledge”):

Every proposition is either true or false and God knows the truth value of each proposition. Suppose that the proposition <Agent S performs act A at time t > is true. If this proposition is true, God has *always known* that it is true. And if God has *always known* that it is true, there is no time at which it is up to S whether or not God knows that it is true. (Indeed, if God has *always known* that it is true, God knows its truth long before S comes into existence and, hence, long before S is able to do anything at all.) But if there is never a time at which it is up to S whether or not God knows that <Agent S performs act A at time t > is true, S does not freely perform A at t . Since this point generalizes to any agent, any act, and any time, free action is impossible.

In what follows, I will offer formal presentations of these arguments and consider what responses are available to opponents of fatalism. In particular, I will consider responses that involve rejecting (i) the arguments’ validity; (ii) the arguments’ assumptions about whether it could be up to an agent whether a proposition has always been true or whether it could be up to an agent whether God has always known that a true proposition is true; (iii) the arguments’ assumptions about the relationship between truth values and times, on the one hand, or God and times, on the other; and (iv) the arguments’ assumptions about whether propositions can change their truth values or whether an essentially omniscient God can acquire knowledge over time.

2 Formulating the Arguments⁹

In an attempt to present the arguments as clearly and precisely as possible, I will stipulate that:

“ p_A ” designates the proposition that S performs A at t .

Its being up to S at time t - whether p_A is (identical to) its being up to S at time t - whether S performs A at t .

“ $N_{s,t}p$ ” designates: p & it is not up to S at t whether p .

$N_{s,t}p$ is equivalent to (i) p & S at t is unable to render p false and (ii) p & there is nothing S at t can do such that, if S were to do it, p would be false.¹⁰

In addition, I note that I will rely on an inference principle similar to (but different from) van Inwagen’s famed “principle β ” (see, e.g., van Inwagen 1983, 2000):

$$\text{(Transfer)} \{N_{s,t}p, \Box(p \rightarrow q)\} \vdash N_{s,t}q$$

While one might be able to formulate the arguments for fatalism without explicitly appealing to a β -like principle, the strongest versions of the arguments will include such an appeal.

With this, I turn to the premises on which the arguments for logical and theological fatalism rely. I have already mentioned Bivalence and Essential Divine Omniscience. Both arguments also depend on some variation on either the Principle of the Fixity of the Past or the Principle of the Fixity of the Present. The former is the principle that:

(FP): Necessarily, for any agent S , any proposition p , and any time t , if (i) p describes a state of affairs that obtains prior to t , (ii) it is not up to S at or after t whether p

while the latter is the principle that:

(FPr): Necessarily, for any agent S , any proposition p , and any time t , if (i) p describes a state of affairs that obtains at t , (ii) it is not up to S at t whether p .

In what follows, I will present the arguments in terms of the Fixity of the Past. I will do so because this seems to be standard practice, probably because it seems more dialectically effective than the alternative. I note, though, that (i) given the definition of free action, the Fixity of the Present is trivially true and (ii) nothing of philosophical significance hinges on my presenting the arguments in terms of the Fixity of the Past rather than the Fixity of the Present.

Having stated what the two arguments for fatalism have in common, I turn my attention to the argument for logical fatalism. It depends on the truth of these principles:¹¹

(Truth-at- t): Necessarily, for any proposition p , if p is true, there is some time t such that p is true at t .

And:

(Immutability): Necessarily, for any proposition p , for any time t , and for any time t^* , p is true at t if and only if p is true at t^* .

The first says that each true proposition is true *at a time*; the second says that propositions do not change their truth values *across times*. I will consider these principles in more detail when I discuss attempts to reject them. For now, I will simply acknowledge that while it is possible to formulate the argument without explicitly invoking these principles, the argument succeeds only if these (or relevantly similar) principles are true.

With the stipulations that (i) " t_{1B} " designates a time approximately one billion years before time t -, (ii) S exists at t -, and (iii) S did not come into existence until long after t_{1B} ,¹² the argument for logical fatalism may be presented as:

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. p_A | Assumption |
| 2. $\Box(p_A \leftrightarrow p_A \text{ is true at } t)$ | Truth-at- t |
| 3. $\Box(p_A \text{ is true at } t \leftrightarrow p_A \text{ is true at } t_{1B})$ | Immutability |
| 4. $\Box(p_A \leftrightarrow p_A \text{ is true at } t_{1B})$ | 2, 3 |
| 5. $N_{s,t}(p_A \text{ is true at } t_{1B})$ | Fixity of the Past |
| 6. $N_{s,t} p_A$ | 4, 5 Transfer |

I note that while this argument depends on the assumption that p_A is true, the same argument could be made, *mutadis mutandis*, on the assumption that p_A is false. What matters is that, given Bivalence, p_A has one truth value or the other (and not both).

With this, I will offer a formal version of the argument for theological fatalism. In addition to depending on Essential Divine Omniscience and the Fixity of the Past (or Present), this version of the argument depends on the thesis that God is everlasting, where:

(Divine Everlastingness) God is everlasting = *df.* Time t obtains if God exists at t ,

and the principle that the knowledge of God is immutable:

(Immutable Knowledge) Necessarily, for any time t , for any time t^* , and for any proposition p , God at t knows p if and only if God at t^* knows p .¹³

This principle of Immutable Knowledge follows from Immutability, Divine Everlastingness, and Essential Divine Omniscience. Here, then, is the argument for theological fatalism:

1' . p_A and God exists	Assumption
2' . $\Box(p_A \leftrightarrow \text{God at } t \text{ knows } p_A)$	1', EDO, Divine Everlastingness
3' . $\Box(\text{God at } t \text{ knows } p_A \leftrightarrow \text{God at } t_{-1B} \text{ knows } p_A)$	Immutable Knowledge
4' . $\Box(p_A \leftrightarrow \text{God at } t_{-1B} \text{ knows } p_A)$	2', 3'
5' . $N_{s,t-}(\text{God at } t_{-1B} \text{ knows } p_A)$	Fixity of the Past
6' . $N_{s,t-}p_A$	4', 5' Transfer

In the next section, I will begin to consider different responses to the two arguments.

First, though, I will pause to note that although some philosophers (e.g., Zagzebski) find the argument for theological fatalism more compelling than the argument for logical fatalism, Ted A. Warfield (1997) has pointed out that if an essentially omniscient God exists necessarily, then for any proposition p , $\langle p \text{ is true at } t \rangle$ is logically equivalent to $\langle \text{God at } t \text{ knows } p \rangle$. Warfield further offers that:

If p and q are logically consistent, then p is consistent with any proposition that is logically equivalent to q .

Warfield's point is that if logical fatalism is false, some proposition p_A is such that (i) $\langle p_A \text{ is true at } t_{-1B} \rangle$ and (ii) $\langle p_A \text{ is true at } t_{-1B} \rangle$ is logically consistent with $\langle \text{It is up to some agent } S \text{ at some time } t \text{ - whether } p_A \rangle$. But given the aforementioned principle, and given that $\langle p_A \text{ is true at } t_{-1B} \rangle$ is logically equivalent to $\langle \text{God at } t_{-1B} \text{ knows } p_A \rangle$, it follows that if logical fatalism is false, some proposition p_A is such that (i) $\langle \text{God at } t_{-1B} \text{ knows } p_A \rangle$ and (ii) $\langle \text{God at } t_{-1B} \text{ knows } p_A \rangle$ is logically consistent with $\langle \text{It is up to some agent } S \text{ at some time } t \text{ - whether } p_A \rangle$. In other words, it follows that if logical fatalism is false, so is theological fatalism (and vice versa).

I will not dwell on assessing Warfield's argument. In what follows, though, I will emphasize that for every response to the argument for logical fatalism, there is an analogous response to the argument for theological fatalism (and vice versa).

3 Response 1: The Arguments are Invalid

The most elegant response to both arguments is to simply deny the validity of the Transfer Principle (and other β -like principles).¹⁴ On behalf of this response, one might note that the strongest case for β -like principles seems to consist of pointing to them and asking "How could they *not* be valid? Doesn't it seem obvious that they are?" Opponents of fatalism could suggest that, actually, the validity of β -like principles is not at all obvious and that unless someone presents them with an argument for the principles' validity, they will continue to reject the fatalists' conclusion.

This response confronts at least two problems. First, β -like principles *do* strike many participants in the debate as valid. Indeed, some defenders of these principles find the core insight so compelling that they simply will not abandon the principles, even if they concede that a *particular* β -like principle must be jettisoned in favor of a reformulation.¹⁵ Second, many participants in the free will debate take it for granted that (i) the Consequence Argument for the incompatibility of free action and determinism is valid only if some β -like principle is valid, and that (ii) without the Consequence Argument, the case for the incompatibility of free action and determinism is relatively weak. Opponents of fatalism who are *libertarians* (who, that is, are incompatibilists about free action and determinism while affirming the thesis that some agents do, in fact, act freely) might reasonably conclude that rejecting the validity of β -like principles is too high a price to pay for a response to fatalism. Fortunately for them, the other responses to fatalism that I consider are consistent with libertarianism.

4 Response 2: Ockhamism

In this section, I will consider Ockhamism, a response to fatalism that challenges the Principle of the Fixity of the Past (and Present). I will follow the standard practice of presenting Ockhamists as drawing a distinction between so-called *hard facts* and *soft facts*. While there is no consensus on how to draw the distinction in question, the basic idea is that “A hard fact about the past is entirely about the past whereas a soft fact is not: a hard fact about, say, t_{1B} is a fact whose obtaining is entirely independent of whatever might happen after t_{1B} , whereas a soft fact about t_{1B} somehow depends on, or involves, or includes events that take place at later times”¹⁶ (Finch and Rea p. 3). Given the definitions already introduced, we can say that a hard fact is included in a time (that is, a present-tense maximal concrete event) that has occurred and a soft fact is a future-directed state of affairs. Of course, whether a fact is hard or soft is relative to a time.

The Ockhamist response to both logical fatalism and theological fatalism may be construed as a rejection of the Principle of the Fixity of the Past (or Present). More precisely, it amounts to the position that the Principle of the Fixity of the Past is ambiguous between the Principle of the Fixity of the Hard Past:

(FHP) Necessarily, for any agent S , any proposition p , and any time t , (i) if p describes a state of affairs O that is a hard fact at t , (ii) it is not up to S at or after t whether p (is true),

and the Principle of the Fixity of the Soft Past:

(FSP) Necessarily, for any agent S , any proposition p , and any time t , (i) if p describes a state of affairs O that is a soft fact at t , (ii) it is not up to S at or after t whether p (is true).

While the former is true, Ockhamists say, the latter – the very principle on which the arguments for fatalism depend – is false.

In order to appreciate why the Ockhamists reject the Principle of the Fixity of the Soft Past, let us consider a specific example. In particular, let us suppose that p_M is true where:

“ p_M ” designates the proposition that Mary marries Harry at t_M .

and:

“ t_M ” designates noon on March 13, 3013;

Given that the current year is 2021, it is *now* a soft fact that p_M is true.

Ockhamists will insist that the soft fact that Mary marries Harry at t_M is consistent with the existence of a time t_{-M} such that (i) t_{-M} is earlier than t_M and (ii) Mary at t_{-M} is able to do something such that, if she were to do it, p_M *would* be false. Perhaps Mary at t_{-M} is able to cancel the wedding, convince Harry that they should elope before March 13, 3013, or shout, “No!” when asked whether she takes Harry as her lawfully wedded spouse. To be clear, Ockhamists do not suggest that Mary is able to do something that would *change* the past. Rather, they contend that the truth of p_M is consistent with Mary’s being able to do something such that, if she *were* to do it, p_M *never would have been true* in the first place. Given that Mary and Harry are, in fact, married at t_M , p_M has always been true and God has always known p_M .

Ockhamists emphasize that p_M has always been true *because of* what happens at t_M , and not the other way around. The order of dependence (or priority) is crucial: the soft facts depend on hard facts in a way that the hard facts do not depend on the soft. Unfortunately, Ockhamists do not typically explain how exactly to read “because of” or what sort of dependence or priority they have in mind. Finch and Rea (2008) have suggested, though, that if *eternalism* about the metaphysics of time is correct, Ockhamism succeeds even without such an explanation. They offer a standard construal of eternalism, according to which eternalism is “the thesis that past, present, and future objects (and, by extension, events) exist” (10).¹⁷ Given the assumption that an event exists if and only if it occurs, eternalism is true only if all past, present, and future events occur. Of course, this is not to say that all past, present, and future events occur *at the same time* (which would be absurd); rather, all the events that occur stand in relations of *earlier-than*, *simultaneous with*, and *later-than* to one another. Given this definition, eternalism implies that if agent S performs act A at time t , S ’s performance of A at t occurs; that is, S ’s performance of A at t exists in the concrete world. And, as Finch and Rea indicate:

[W]e are fully prepared, in the ordinary case, to think that the proposition that S performs A is ontologically dependent on S ’s performance of A and, moreover, that S ’s performance of A is ontologically prior to the truth of the proposition that S performs A . The eternalist Ockhamist’s point is that, however we ordinarily understand the relationship between true propositions about agents’ action and the agents’ actions themselves, this is how we should understand the relationship between true propositions like [It was true at t_{-1B} that S performs A at t] and S ’s performance of A at t . (11–12)

If they are right, then if eternalism is true, there is a straightforward sense in which its being true at t_{-1B} that S performs A at t is dependent on (the concrete event that is) S ’s performing A at t . Moreover, they might have added, there is also a straightforward sense in which God’s knowing at t_{-1B} that S performs A at t depends on (the concrete event that is) S ’s performing A at t . Eternalist Ockhamists need not provide a full account of knowledge in general or divine knowledge in particular; they need only point out that there is nothing especially exotic about the suggestion that God’s knowledge of what happens at t depends on what happens at t , but not vice versa.

Of course, Finch and Rea could have made the same point about Ockhamism and ontological dependence without invoking eternalism *per se*: any account of the metaphysics of time according to which all future objects and events determinately exist would do just as well. In the final section of this essay, I will consider which dialectical options are available to opponents of fatalism who reject the thesis that the future determinately exists. First, though, I will turn my attention to another strategy altogether.

5 Response 3: Propositions Are Not True *at Times*; God Does Not Have Knowledge *at Times*

In this section, I will consider responding to the argument for logical fatalism by rejecting Truth-at-*t* and, analogously, responding to the argument for theological fatalism by rejecting Divine Everlastingness. The former response challenges the very idea that propositions are true *at times*; the latter response challenges the claim that God exists *at times*. I note that while these responses are analogous to one another, they do not seem to stand or fall together: it seems that one could accept Truth-at-*t* while rejecting Divine Everlastingness, or vice versa.

While Truth-at-*t* might seem innocuous at first, Peter van Inwagen raises a significant challenge against it. In particular, he suggests that it is simply *nonsense* to assert that a proposition is true at a time. He makes this suggestion by considering similar expressions (e.g., “true at some particular moment,” “true at every moment,” “became true,” “remained true,” “is unchangeably true”) and contending that he cannot “see what these phrases mean if they are used as they are used in the above argument for fatalism” (35). He concedes that if someone were to say, “Municipal bonds are a good investment,” and if someone else were to reply, “That used to be true but it isn’t true anymore,” his respondent’s words “would be a model of lucidity” (35). But these words are lucid precisely because his respondent could express the same thoughts without resorting to talk of propositions true at times. For instance, he could reply, “While municipals bonds used to have a high rate of return, they do not have a high rate of return today.” How exactly could one capture the meaning of “ p_A was true 1 billion years ago” without using the notion of truth a time? Van Inwagen evaluates several proposals for rephrasing and argues that each is meaningless. As such, he concludes that the argument for logical fatalism rests on a faulty assumption about the relationship between truths and times.

The analogous response to the argument for theological fatalism can be traced back to Boethius, a sixth-century Christian philosopher. Boethius considered God the one concrete object who exists *atemporally* or *eternally* (that is, outside of the temporal order). According to the thesis of Divine Eternity:

(Divine Eternity) God exists and for any time t , God does not exist at t .

Of course, if God does not *exist* at any time, God does not *have knowledge* at any time. As such, it is simply false that God at t_{TB} knows the truth value of p_A . While the principle of the Fixity of the Past may be true, its truth has nothing to do with God’s knowledge.

But while Boethius thought that God neither exists nor has knowledge at times, he certainly did not think God was ignorant of what happens within the temporal order. As Linda Zagzebski explains:

The way Boethius describes God’s cognitive grasp of temporal reality, all temporal events are before the mind of God at once. To say “at once” or “simultaneously” is to use a temporal metaphor, but Boethius is clear that it does not make sense to think of the whole of temporal reality as being before God’s mind in a single *temporal* present. It is an *atemporal* present, a single complete grasp of all events in the entire span of time. (2016)

This explanation suggests that Boethius endorsed eternalism with respect to the metaphysics of time. Insofar as God is eternal, none of the events included in the temporal order is temporally closer to God than any other; insofar as God is omniscient, God knows exactly which

events occur, how these events are temporally ordered with respect to one another, and how objects and events that exist at different times are diachronically related.

Objections to Boetheianism abound.¹⁸ For instance, philosophical objections challenge the very coherence of the position while theological objections question whether Boethius's picture of God is consistent with other theses about the nature of God and God's relationship to creation. In the present context, though, the most pressing objection is one that has been raised by Zagzebski: even if Boethius is correct about the relationship between God and the temporal order, the threat of theological fatalism remains. After all, as Zagzebski notes, "we have no more reason to think we can do anything about God's timeless knowing than about God's past knowing. The timeless realm is as much out of our reach as the past." Indeed, it seems that the theological fatalist may simply reformulate the argument, replacing the principle of the Fixity of the Past (or Present) with a principle of the Fixity of the Eternal:

(FE): Necessarily, for any agent S , any proposition p , and any time t , if (i) p describes a state of affairs that (a) obtains and (b) does not obtain at any time, then (ii) it is not up to S at t whether p .

Stipulating that:

" p_{GEKA} " designates the proposition that God eternally knows p_A ,

the Boethian analogue of the argument for theological fatalism may be formulated such that:

1" . p_A	Assumption
2" . $\Box(p_A \leftrightarrow p_{GEKA})$	EDO, Divine Eternity
3" . $N_{s,t} p_{GEKA}$	Fixity of the Eternal
4" . $N_{s,t} p_A$	2", 3" Transfer

So, merely asserting that God is eternal does not undermine the argument for theological fatalism.

But there seems to be more to the Boethian solution than this mere assertion. If we construe Boethianism as the conjunction of the theses that (i) God is eternal and (ii) standard eternalism is true, and if Boethians make the reasonable assumption that God's eternal knowledge of what happens at t depends on what happens at t , but not vice versa, the Boethian response to theological fatalism seems importantly similar to the Ockhamists' (though without the distinction between hard and soft facts). In order to see that this is so, let us return to p_M , the proposition that Mary marries Harry at t_M . Boethians can offer that although God eternally knows p_M , this eternal knowledge is consistent with the claim that there is a time t_{-M} such that (i) t_{-M} is earlier than t_M and (ii) Mary at t_{-M} is able to do something such that, if she were to do it, it would be false that God eternally knows p_M ; in this case, God would eternally know that p_M is false. The Principle of the Fixity of the Eternal is false, Boethian might say, because what God eternally knows depends on what happens in the temporal order, and not vice versa. Indeed, if Mary would have decided to postpone the wedding, God would have known from eternity that p_M was false. But given that Mary did, in fact, go through with the wedding, God eternally knows that she does so.

Of course, this response leaves one with many questions about the relationship between an atemporal God and a temporal concrete order. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this essay to explore these questions, just as it is beyond the scope of this essay to explore other objections to Boethianism.

Before moving on, though, it seems crucial to raise one further question about the Fixity of the Eternal: does this principle undermine van Inwagen's response to the argument for logical fatalism? After all, if propositions are not true *at times*, and if a proposition p is true, it seems that the state of affairs of p 's *being true* obtains eternally (or "outside the temporal order," or "in the timeless realm," to use Zagzebski's phrase).

Though I do not presume to know what van Inwagen himself would say about this objection, at least two responses seem available. First, one might object to the thesis that propositions are "eternally true" just as van Inwagen objects to the thesis that propositions are "true at times." In adopting the analogous strategy, one might ask what is meant by " p is eternally true." Taking a cue from van Inwagen, one might point out that this is a metaphysician's turn of phrase if ever there was one, and wonder why we should suppose that it is meaningful. One might add that propositions are either true *simpliciter* or not at all: they are neither true at times nor true eternally.

Then again, one might also adopt the strategy I have recommended to the Boethian: affirm standard eternalism about the metaphysics of time and insist that the Principle of the Fixity of the Eternal is false because what is eternally true depends on what happens in the temporal order, and not vice versa. As far as I know, van Inwagen has never committed himself to the truth of eternalism, let alone the Boethian-style response to the principle of the Fixity of the Eternal. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to note this dialectical option.

Further discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this essay and, as such, I turn to a final type of response to the arguments for fatalism.

6 Response 4: The Open Future View and Open Theism

In this section, I will consider both the response to logical fatalism offered by the *open future view* and the response to theological fatalism offered by *open theism*. If the open future view is correct and God is temporally located, open theism is true; however, the converse does not hold: van Inwagen, for instance, is an open theist who affirms that God is temporally located but denies the open future view. In what follows, I hope to make the dialectical options clear.

With respect to the open future view, Amy Seymour (manuscript) offers that:

According to [the open future view], if the future is to be open, the future must be metaphysically unsettled ... This unsettledness is not merely epistemic or linguistic. It is not that we merely do not know what the future holds or that our terms cannot precisely capture what will happen – something about the nature of reality itself is unsettled. (1)

Given this definition, the open future view is inconsistent with standard eternalism and any other account of the metaphysics of time that entails that the future determinately exists.

According to the open future view, if p_+ is a contingent proposition that purports to describe a state of affairs that obtains in the future and does not obtain *now*, p_+ is not true *now*, but it *might become true*. If, for instance, Mary does indeed marry Harry at noon on March 13, 3013, the proposition that Mary marries Harry at noon on March 13, 3013 will become true at the relevant future time. Since this proposition is not true now but will become true, its truth value will change. In short, Immutability is false and, hence, so is the relevant premise of the argument for logical fatalism:

3. $\Box(p_A \text{ is true at } t \leftrightarrow p_A \text{ is true at } t_{1B})$.

This response is at least *prima facie* plausible: after all, it amounts to the claim that if a state of affairs does not yet obtain, it is not yet true that it will obtain.

In terms of working out the details, proponents of the open future view have two dialectical options: (i) denying bivalence; (ii) insisting on the falsity of all future contingent propositions that are not entailed by propositions that are true now (hereafter, *future contingents*). I will consider each view in turn.

According to open futurists who deny bivalence, future contingents are neither true nor false: while some bivalence deniers contend that such propositions have no truth value at all, others insist that they have a truth value *other than* truth or falsity. Those in the latter group typically embrace *multivalent* logic systems, e.g., the three-valued logic systems offered by Jan Kukasiewicz and Stephen C. Kleene. As Theodore Sider explains, “The third truth value is (in most cases, anyway) supposed to represent sentences that ... have some other status. This other status could be taken in various ways, depending on the intended application, for example: ‘meaningless’, ‘undefined’, or ‘indeterminate’ ” (Sider 2010: 73).

At first blush, it may seem reasonable to suggest that propositions about the future are indeterminate in truth value: after all, since the future has not yet obtained, one might say, it is indeterminate what will (or will not) happen. One must consider, though, that classical logic is bivalent, so one cannot consistently deny bivalence without admitting that “classical logic is wrong – that it provides an inadequate model of (genuine) logical truth and logical consequence” (Sider 72). The rejection of classical logic may seem to be too high a price to pay. Then again, as I have said, various multivalent logics have been developed. Moreover, one might be inclined to accept a multivalent logic because it can help not only with future contingents but also with sentences that (i) involve vague terms, (ii) express propositions with false presuppositions (e.g., that the king of France is bald), or (iii) seem to include references to fictional entities. Given the resources afforded by multivalent logics, some proponents of the open future view conclude that the rejection of classical logic is a reasonable price to pay.

Other proponents of the open future view, by contrast, maintain their commitment to classical logic and endorse the position known as “all falsism” (so named by Amy Seymour, manuscript) and “Russellian open futurism” (so named by Patrick Todd 2016). They agree with bivalence deniers that future contingents are *not true*; indeed, they insist that a proposition *p* is true if and only if either the corresponding state of affairs obtains or *p* is entailed by propositions that correspond to states of affairs that obtain. Since future contingents correspond to states of affairs that do not yet obtain and are not entailed by propositions of the relevant sort, it obviously follows that these propositions are not true. Here is where their disagreement with bivalence deniers becomes salient: all-false theorists insist that, necessarily, a proposition *p* is not true if and only if *p* is false; a proposition’s not being true is both necessary and sufficient for its falsity. Since future contingents correspond to states of affairs that do not yet obtain, they are not yet true and, hence, they are *all false*.

With this, one might object that this position entails the falsity of the Law of Non-Contradiction (according to which it is necessarily the case that $\neg(p \ \& \ \neg p)$). All-false theorists will insist that this objection confuses propositions of the form <It is false that *O* will obtain> with propositions of the form <*O* will not obtain>; the former but not the latter is the negation of <*O* will obtain>; the former but not the latter is consistent with the truth of <It is false that *O* will not obtain>. To return to the case of Mary and Harry: according to the all-false theorist, <It is false that Mary will marry Harry at t_M > and <It is false that Mary will not marry Harry at t_M >; the former is the negation of <Mary will marry Harry at t_M >; and the negation of <Mary will marry Harry at t_M > is not equivalent to <Mary will not marry Harry at t_M >.

While one might balk at the all-false theorists' claim that false propositions become true, one should not confuse this claim with a violation of the Principle of Non-Contradiction.

Whether open futurists go the route of bivalence denial or all-falsism, they must admit that their view *seems* at odds with various practices of ordinary life. After all, we constantly form beliefs and make statements about the future and, in so doing, we *seem* to proceed on the assumption that these propositions are true. The open futurist must either concede that we are constantly mistaken about the nature of reality or explain our behavior in such a way that it does not, despite appearances, depend on false assumptions about the future. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this essay to offer an extensive discussion of either variation on the open future view.

Instead of dwelling on how well the open future view fares as a response to the argument for logical fatalism, I will shift my focus to *open theism*, the analogous response to the argument for theological fatalism. According to open theists, the thesis of Immutable Knowledge is false and, as such, so is the premise that:

3'. $\Box(\text{God at } t \text{ knows } p_A \leftrightarrow \text{God at } t_{.1B} \text{ knows } p_A)$

While God at t knows that S performs A at t , the open theist denies that God at $t_{.1B}$ knows that this is case: God's knowledge increases over time.

Open theists do not take themselves to be denying the essential omniscience of God and, in fact, there are three dialectical options for open theists who seek to maintain their commitment to this theological principle.¹⁹ First, open theists might embrace the open future view along with "all-falsism"; in this case, they might define essential divine omniscience such that:

(EDO') God is essentially omniscient =_{df.} For any proposition p , (i) either God at t knows that p is true or God at t knows that p is false, (ii) God at t knows that p is not both true and false, and (iii) it is impossible for God to be mistaken about the truth value of any proposition

In this case, open theists would contend that since it is false at $t_{.1B}$ that S performs A at t , God at $t_{.1B}$ knows that it is false that S performs A at t . When, at t , it becomes true that S performs A at t , God at t will come to know what S does at t .

Second, open theists might adopt the open future view while rejecting bivalence. They would offer something like this as a definition of essential divine omniscience:

(EDO'') God is essentially omniscient =_{df.} For any proposition p , (i) God at t knows the truth value of p at t and (ii) it is impossible for God to be mistaken about the truth value of any proposition.

In this case, they will insist that since it is neither true nor false at $t_{.1B}$ that S performs A at t , God at $t_{.1B}$ knows that it is neither true nor false that S performs A at t . When, at t , it becomes true that S performs A at t , God at t comes to know that S does so.

But there is a third dialectical option for the open theist, as discussed by Peter van Inwagen.²⁰ He presents his discussion of theological fatalism in the context of discussing the problem of evil (see his (2006)), initially offering that:

A being is omniscient if, for every proposition, that being believes either that proposition or its denial, and it is metaphysically impossible for that being to have false beliefs. (26)

But then he asks:

Why not say that even an omniscient being is unable to know certain things – those such that its knowing them would be an intrinsically impossible state of affairs? Or we might say this: an omnipotent being is also omniscient if it knows everything it is able to know. (82).

I take it that van Inwagen is suggesting that:

(EDO'') God is essentially omniscient =_{df.} For any proposition p such that it is possible for God at t to know p or its denial, God at t believes either p or its denial, and it is impossible for God to be mistaken about the truth value of any proposition.

And that he is further suggesting that:

For any proposition p_A such that p_A is a proposition about a free act that agent S performs at time t , and for any time t' such that t' is earlier than t , it is impossible for God at t' to know whether p_A or its denial is true.

On van Inwagen's picture, the complete state of the world prior to t fails to determine whether S performs A at t . As such, God withholds belief, prior to t , about S 's performance of A at t : Until t is present, God simply cannot know whether S 's performance of A at t obtains.

In response, one might object that this definition seems strained, as if the only reason to endorse it is to escape the problem of theological fatalism. One might demand a reason to think that there is a difference between (i) true propositions and (ii) true propositions such that it is possible for an essentially omniscient and everlasting God to know that they are true. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that we will find such a reason without embarking on a thorough discussion of divine knowledge, which is beyond the scope of this essay.

With respect to the first two varieties of open theism (those corresponding to all-falsism and bivalence denial), theological objections seem more prevalent than logical ones. Indeed, much ink has been spilled in considering whether open theism is consistent with orthodox Christianity. Many of its defenders consider themselves orthodox Christians (van Inwagen and Hasker, e.g.), but some opponents suggest that open theists ought to be regarded as heretics. While open theism is clearly inconsistent with, for instance, Roman Catholicism, its compatibility with other Christian traditions is not so obvious. The theological disputes over open theism certainly cannot be settled here.

7 Conclusion

The arguments for logical and theological fatalism are structurally similar, with both depending on (i) the definition of free action, (ii) some variation on the Transfer Principle, and (iii) the principle of the Fixity of the Past (or Present). Moreover, while the argument for logical fatalism depends on (iv) Bivalence, (v) the thesis that propositions are true at times, and (vi) the thesis that propositions do not change their truth values, the argument for theological fatalism depends on the analogous theses that (iv') God is essentially omniscient, (v') God exists at every time, and (vi') God's knowledge is immutable.

As I suggested, the most elegant response to both arguments is the rejection of the Transfer Principle. However, some participants in the debate find the Principle so obvious that they will find this strategy prohibitively costly; moreover, as I explained, incompatibilists regarding free action and determinism should be loath to abandon this principle, given that it is crucial for the Consequence Argument for incompatibilism.

Ockhamism is available as a response to both logical and theological fatalism: Ockhamists distinguish between the Fixity of the Hard Past and the Fixity of the Soft Past, and insist that while the former is true, the latter is false; given that the arguments for fatalism depend upon the latter, Ockhamists contend that they have quelled the fatalists' threat to free action. Following Finch and Rea, I suggested that Ockhamists ought to embrace standard eternalism with respect to the metaphysics of time.

I made a similar suggestion with respect to the Boethian response to the argument for theological fatalism. According to this response, the argument fails because God does not have knowledge *at times*. Following Zagzebski, I suggested that the argument could be reformulated in terms of the Fixity of the Eternal rather than the Fixity of the Past (or Present). I then pointed out that if eternalism about the metaphysics of time is true, and if God's eternal knowledge depends on which concrete events actually occur, the Boethian can make a case against the Fixity of the Eternal analogous to the Ockhamist's case against the Fixity of the Soft Past. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this essay to delve more deeply into either Ockhamism or Boethianism.

Alongside the Boethian response to theological fatalism, I considered van Inwagen's response to the argument for logical fatalism: according to van Inwagen, the argument fails insofar as it includes the premise that propositions are true at times – a proposition that van Inwagen takes to be meaningless.

Finally, I considered the open future view and open theism. According to open future views, the future is unsettled and, as such, some propositions about the future change truth values. While some open theists also adhere to open future views, van Inwagen is an exception: though he thinks that all propositions have true values, he thinks that propositions about agents' future free acts are unknowable; he offers a definition of Essential Divine Omniscience that allows him to say that God is essentially omniscient even though God lacks knowledge of the relevant truth values. As one would expect, philosophers' theological commitments play a crucial role in their evaluations of open theism.

There is no obvious response to either fatalist argument. In formulating a response, one must consider not only whether one is a compatibilist about free will and determinism but also one's views on the metaphysics of time and the truth values of propositions (and, when considering the argument for theological fatalism, one's theological commitments). Indeed, debates over logical and theological fatalism are strongly connected to other philosophical debates, and acknowledging these connections seems crucial for moving the debates forward.

Notes

- 1 For discussion of the debate between leeway and source theorists, see Timpe 2017.
- 2 See, e.g., Campbell (2007, 2008, 2010).
- 3 In the present context, we need not be very careful about defining states of affairs: it is enough to say that (i) states of affairs are *ways things are*, (ii) for each state of affairs *O*, there is a corresponding proposition *p*, and (iii) a proposition *p* is true if and only if the corresponding state of affairs *O* obtains.
- 4 Anyone concerned about relativity theory can add the qualifier "from a frame of reference."
- 5 Moreover, in the present context, nothing of substance hinges on whether relationism or substantivalism with respect to time is true.
- 6 Throughout this essay, "possible" should be read as "broadly logically possible" and "necessary" should be read as "broadly logically necessary."

- 7 Throughout this essay, “impossible” should be read as “broadly logically impossible.”
- 8 Although philosophers disagree about how to define “omniscience” in general and “essential omniscience” in particular, this definition is satisfactory in the present context. For discussion of the notion of omniscience, see Weirenga 2017.
- 9 My formulation of the arguments here tracks my formulation of the argument for logical fatalism in Finch 2017. Moreover, my formulation of the arguments is obviously inspired by Peter van Inwagen’s formulation of the so-called Consequence Argument for the incompatibility of free action and determinism (where determinism is the thesis that, at any given time, there is only one nomologically possible future.) See, e.g., van Inwagen 1983, 2000.
- 10 In the present context, I could just as well have used “might” in place of “would.” As McKay and Johnson 1996 and van Inwagen 2000 make clear, there are certain contexts in which the difference between “would” and “might” conditionals is significant; this context, however, is not one of them.
- 11 More accurately: it depends on the truth of principles *relevantly similar* to these.
- 12 For the purposes of this essay, in order to streamline discussion, I am setting aside the possibility of the sort of time travel familiar from science fiction.
- 13 More accurately: it depends on the truth of principles *relevantly similar* to these.
- 14 For discussion of the validity of β -like principles see Flint 1987.
- 15 See, again, McKay and Johnson 1996 and van Inwagen 2000.
- 16 For discussion of the distinction between hard and soft facts, see Todd 2013.
- 17 To clarify: Finch and Rea assume that if eternalism is true, all past, present, and future objects (and, by extension, events) *determinately* exist and all past, present, and future events *determinately* occur. This is the standard construal of eternalism. By contrast, Elizabeth Barnes and Ross Cameron (2011) present a version of eternalism according to which future objects exist *indeterminately*, so that even though future objects exist, it is “unsettled” what will happen in the future. Their view is a species of *open futurism*, which I will discuss in the final section of this paper.
- 18 For discussion of the debate over Boethianism, see Helm 2014.
- 19 See, e.g., Rhoda 2008 and Tuggy 2007.
- 20 This strategy is also endorsed by William Hasker (1998, 2004).

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