

Seminar: Time, Truth and Freedom

Dale Tuggy

One of the great conversations of philosophy, which begins with Aristotle and continues to the present day (though it is not a topic which is in vogue), concerns the problem of logical fatalism. In a word, if it was true in the times of the dinosaurs that you would have eggs for breakfast today, then that logically implies that you have eggs for breakfast today. Thus it appears to have been “fixed” in the time of the dinosaurs what you eat for breakfast today; ergo, your choice of breakfast was not free, for you couldn’t have done otherwise. Similar considerations apply to all your choices at all times, hence a kind of fatalism follows. Any sort of libertarian freedom is ruled out, and even compatibilists are perturbed; causal determination is one thing, and it seems that logical determinism is another.

Almost no one believes that this sort of argument is sound, but it is striking that most replies to the argument are extremely superficial. The fatalist is accused of some laughable confusion about truth, or some obvious logical fallacy, or a modal fallacy, etc.. A real answer to the difficulty, though, requires one to say a lot about time, freedom, truth, and logic, and even God if one is a theist. This is why logical fatalism has been a popular topic; it gives us an angle from which to consider some of central features of any metaphysical scheme.

Our procedure will be to give a close reading to some rigorous arguments for logical fatalism, and examine various superficial rebuttals. We will then proceed to examine some of the innovative accounts of time, truth, logic, and freedom that have been formed in response to fatalistic arguments, and see whether any of these plausibly shows why arguments for fatalism are unsound. Most epistemologists busy themselves with skeptical arguments not because skepticism is a live option for them, but rather because skeptical arguments force them to sharpen their accounts of justification and knowledge. In this course, we will examine fatalistic arguments with a view towards sharpening our views on time, truth, logic, and freedom. Particular attention will be given to a neglected giant of twentieth-century philosophy and logic, A.N. Prior.

Tentative Schedule:

Class, Subject

Required Reading

I. The Case for Fatalism

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| 1. What fatalism is not | van Inwagen’s <i>An Essay on Free Will</i>
ch. 2 |
| 2. an exposition of Aristotle’s <i>On Interpretation</i> I.9 | Sorabji, “Tomorrow’s Sea Battle: an argument from past truth” |
| 3. Aristotle, cont. | Cahn, ch. 3 |
| 4. some bad responses | Cahn, ch. 1-2, excerpts of Quine, Williams, Ryle, etc. |
| 5. the “Master Argument” of Diodorus Cronus | Cahn ch. 4 |
| 6. Richard Taylor’s arguments for fatalism | Metaphysics, ch. 6; Cahn ch. 6 |
| 7. cont. | |

II. Lukasiewicz, Prior, and the Rediscovery of Temporal Logic

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| 8. temporal logic in late medieval philosophy | Peter de Rivo, Peter Aureol excerpts |
| 9. cont. | |

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| 10. Taylor: an Aristotelian stance | “The Problem of Future Contingencies” |
| 11. Lukasiewicz on 3-valued logic, determinism | Lukasiewicz in McCall pp. 15-65. |
| 12. fatalistic arguments in temporal/modal logic | Tuggy, “Three Arguments for Fatalism”, “Truth and Indeterminism” |
| 13. A.N. Prior on non-bivalent logic | <i>Formal Logic</i> , 2nd ed. III.2 |
| 14. “Indeterminism and Neuter Propositions”
van Fraassen on truth-value gaps | Prior 1957, pp. 94-103;
“Singular Terms, Truth-Value Gaps, and Free Logic” |
| 15. “Limited Indeterminism” | Prior 1968 pp. 59-65. |
| 16. “Time and Determinism” | Prior 1967 pp. 113-36. |
| 17. “The Formalities of Omniscience” | Prior 1968, pp. 26-44. |
| 18. Purtil: infinite truth values | “Fatalism and Omnitemporality of Truth” |
| 19. W.L. Craig vs. non-bivalent logic | Craig 1991 pp. 42-93. |
| 20. cont. | Haack, <i>Deviant Logic</i> (excerpts) |
| 21. Tarski’s schema, bivalence and the law of excluded middle | McCall, “Excluded Middle, Bivalence and Fatalism”, Tuggy, “Logic without Bivalence: Taking the Leap” |

III. Time, Tense and Logics of Agency

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| 22. Prior on the nature of time | “Some Free Thinking about Time” |
| 23. cont. | Butterfield, “Prior’s Conception of Time” |
| 24. Nuel Belnap’s agency logic | “Agents in Branching Time” |
| 25. cont. | |
| 26. tenses: eliminable or not? | Smith, <i>Language and Time</i> pp. 1-98 |
| 27. the present and the special theory of relativity | Smith, pp. 225-60 |

Requirements and Grading

There are 400 possible points for the course, which break down as follows:

Reading Reports (2-3 pgs)	
@ 50 points X 6	300
<u>Final Paper (10-15 pgs)</u>	<u>100</u>
Total	400

At six points during the semester, roughly every other week, you must present to the seminar and hand in brief reading reports, in which you summarize and briefly react to parts of that day’s reading. These will be used as a basis for discussion, and may be used to develop your final paper. A draft of the final paper will be read to the class 2-3 weeks before the end of the course, to then be revised and handed in at the end of the semester.