

# Fate

Richard Taylor  
Intro to Philosophy  
Professor Doug Olena

# Fatalism & Determinism

- Fatalism is the belief that whatever happens is unavoidable... [I]t provides the basis of the attitude of calm acceptance that the fatalist is thought, quite correctly, to embody.
- A determinist should be a fatalist if he is consistent.
- Fatalism is humiliating. Evading the issue is comforting. 89

# ...with Respect to the Future and the Past

- A fatalist thus thinks about the future in the way we all think of the past, for everyone is a fatalist as he looks *back* on things.
- He thinks of both past and future under the “aspect of eternity,” the way God is supposed to view them.
- We say of things past that they are no longer within our power. The fatalist says they never were. 89

# The Sources of Fatalism

- Theological sources
  - If God knows everything then all of history is the unfolding of what God knows to be true.
  - We do not choose to make the future what it is. We have already in God's foreknowledge accomplished the future as He saw it.

# The Sources of Fatalism

- Presuppositions of science and logic
  - Since every event has a cause there is no event that is uncaused. Once we understand that all of history is an unbroken chain of cause and effect, we realize that it couldn't have turned out differently. Nor will the future be different from what could be expected according to cause and effect. Hard determinism

# The Sources of Fatalism

- Presuppositions of science and logic
  - It is easy to suppose that there is a body of truth about what will happen in the future, whether anybody knows it or not. Hence everything asserted in that body of truth will happen... precisely as it is described therein.

# Divine Omniscience

- It is not startling if God knows the events of the entire history of the human race, that if he divulges these truths to people, that those events that have been prophesied are actually going to happen.

# The Story of Osmo

- Osmo died at the age of 29 just as the book said he would.

# 4 Questions

1. Why did he become, or nearly become, a fatalist?
2. Just what did his fatalism amount to?
3. Was his belief justified in terms of the evidence he had?
4. Is that belief justified in terms of the evidence we have—or in other words, should we be fatalists too?

# Why did he become, or nearly become, a fatalist?

- Osmo became a fatalist because there existed a set of true statements about the details of his life, both past and future, and he came to know what some of these statements were and to believe them, including many concerning the future. That is the whole of it. 93

# What then did Osmo believe?

- Osmo did not believe that certain things were going to happen to him *no matter what*.
- With respect to those things each of us recognizes as beyond his control, we are of necessity fatalists.
- The question of fatalism is simply: Of all the things that happen in the world, which, if any, are avoidable? The fatalist replies, “None.” 94

# Was Osmo's fatalism justified?

- Of course it was.
- Given that there is a set of true statements about the future, that God knows, it is impossible that any one of those statements should turn out to be false, even though psychologically we would like to think that we could change the events about which the statement describes. 94

# Is the doctrine of fatalism true?

- This amounts to asking whether our circumstances are significantly different from Osmo's. It is not possible to know, given our current knowledge.
- The fact that there exist a set of statements about Osmo's life that are true is enough to justify fatalism.
- If there are similarly true statements about our lives, published or not, we are in Osmo's position. 96, 97

# Law of Excluded Middle

- Nothing becomes true or ceases to be true; whatever is truth at all simply *is* true.
- There is no middle ground between what is true and what is false.
- When we speak of what might be true, we are only speaking of what we don't know for sure.

# Objections

I. One can neither foresee the future nor prove that there is any god, or even if there is that he could know in advance the free actions of men.

The reply to this is that it is irrelevant. The ideas of God and divination were introduced illustratively. 97

# Objections

2. True statements are not the cause of anything. Statements only entail; they do not cause, and hence threaten no man's freedom.

The reply to this is that it is irrelevant. The ideas of God and divination were introduced illustratively. 97

# Objections

3. The whole argument just conflates fact and necessity into one and the same thing, treating as unavoidable what is merely true.

No one has been able to make a true statement false. How strong is the claim that something can be done when in fact it never has been done in the whole history of the universe. 97, 98

# Objections

4. The fatalist argument rests on a “confusion of modalities.” The fact that something is true entails only that its denial is false not that it is impossible.

To deny its truth by saying that it is possible that it can be made false is impossible. How can something be true and false at the same time. 98

# Objections

5. Discard the possibility of statements being true in advance. We cannot say of the future whether it is true or false.

This objection is arbitrary fiction. What is at issue here is the law of excluded middle. Since there are such things as true statements about the future, to deny them is to do away with the law of excluded middle.  
98, 99

# My Objection

- It is clear that the future is known by God, that he could state what is going to happen.
- This truth is transcendental. It is not a statement of fact to us like an event in the past.
- In fact it is not a statement at all. We can not put it to any recognizable logical or scientific test since we can not know whether it is in fact true or not, or even possible.

# My Objection 2

- If this event in the future can't be tested by the scientific or logical tools we have, then it can not be proved by the law of excluded middle which depends on a known truth, not a possible truth.
- Taylor is claiming a God's eye view with respect to the future on the claim that there is something true though undefined, unknown about a possible unidentified future event.