Fatalism

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14 The Nature of Reality

Fatalism

- Fatalism is the idea that whatever will be has to be. In a sense, then, it may threaten free will, since it implies any of your actions are necessary.

- The fatalist conclusion has been thought to derive from a variety of causes, e.g., logic alone, the nature of time, or divine omniscience. But the core premise is logical.

- Note that fatalism is not the idea that the laws of nature/physical causes prevent free action...

- ...doesn't say that there is any purpose guiding our fates

- ...doesn't say that we or anyone know our fates
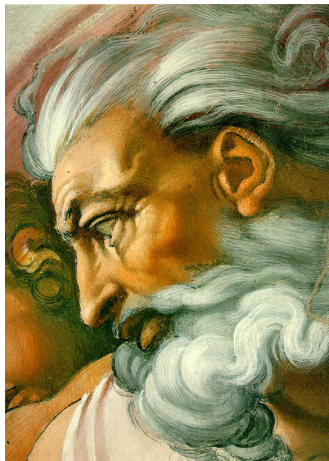

Three Fates in Greek mythology

- ...the fatalist conclusion will apply to all events, not merely ones that are the results of our actions

- ...even events that physics tells us are fundamentally stochastic (chancy)
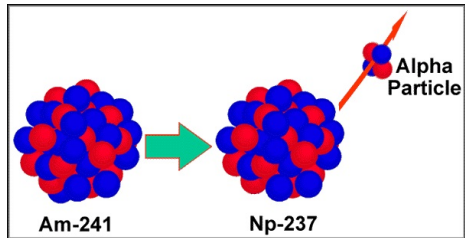
Loosely put:

- If God is omniscient, he now (t_1) knows that I will be doing *A* at 12pm March 4, 2017 (t_2).

- If I am really free at t_2, then it is within my power to bring it about that $\neg A$ at t_2 (or make God's knowledge at t_1 false).

- But God is omniscient, and this means he cannot make mistakes.

- So you are not really free.

D.C. Williams:

> *"I wish to defend the view of the world... which treats the totality of being, of facts or of events, as spread out eternally in the dimension of time as well as the dimensions of space... there 'exists' an eternal world total in which past and future events are as determinably located, characterized, and truly describable as are southern and western events."*

- The tenseless theory is "the teeth by which the jaws of the intellect grip the flesh of occurrence"

- Future action *A* is either on the block or not. Following the same reasoning in the previous case, we could arrive at the fatalist conclusion... or so it seems.

Argument from the nature of time

1. The tenseless theory of time implies the law of excluded middle (LEM), according to which every proposition, including those about the future, are either true, or if not true, then false.

2. If LEM is true, then no one has free will.

3. Therefore, if the tenseless theory of time is true, then no one has free will.

4. The tenseless theory of time is true.

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5. Therefore, there is no free will.

Aristotle

Let $S :=$ 'There will be a sea battle tomorrow'

1. Necessarily, either S is true now or S is false now. (LEM)

2. If S is true now, then it is now necessarily true that there will be a sea battle tomorrow.

3. If S is false now, then it is now necessarily true that there will not be a sea battle tomorrow.

4. It is now either necessarily true that there will be a sea battle tomorrow or necessarily true that there will not be a sea battle tomorrow.
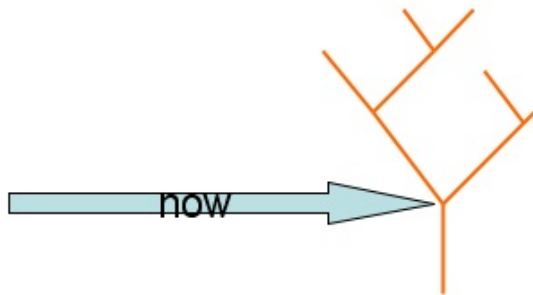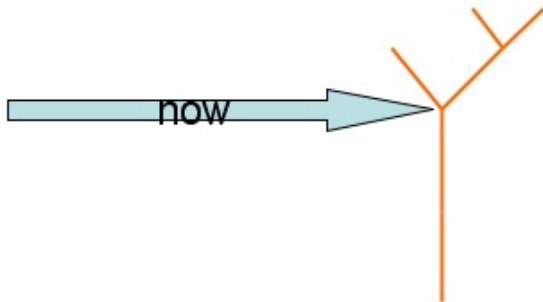
Law of Excluded Middle

Law (Law of Excluded Middle)

For any statement S, either it is true or its denial is true.

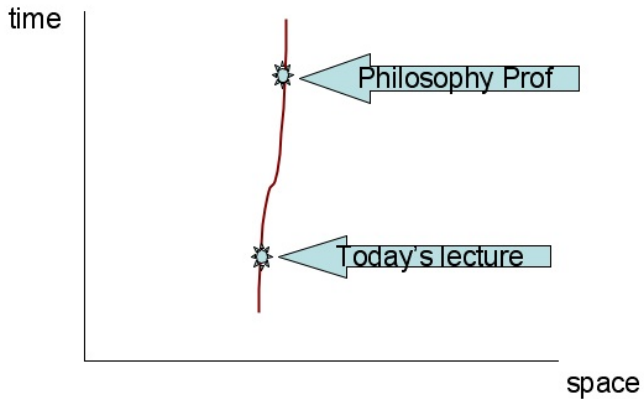Aristotle: LEM is not true for future contingent propositions

$\Rightarrow$ Thus, 'branch attrition' may serve as a motivation for, or a justification of, the denial of LEM.

Response 2: Oaklander

- Truth is correspondence to reality.

- But which reality, tenseless or tensed?

- Does true at t_2 imply that there are any facts at t_1 that make t_2 true?

time

space

Philosophy Prof

Today's lecture

Jordan Howard Sobel, *Puzzles for the Will*

(1) Either you will be killed at time *t* or not be killed at *t*.

(2) If you will be killed at *t*, then you will be killed whatever precautions you take.

(3) If you will be killed whatever precautions you take, then it is pointless to take precautions.

(4) Therefore, if you will be killed, then it is pointless to take precautions.

(5) If you will not be killed... (rerun 2)

(6) ... (rerun 3)

(7) ... (rerun 4)

∴ Hence, it is pointless to take precautions.

(2′) ... then you will be killed whatever precautions you actually take.

(2″) ... then you would be killed whatever precautions you would take.

(3′) If you will be killed whatever precautions you actually take, then it is pointless to take precautions.

(3″) If you would be killed whatever precautions you would take, then it is pointless to take precautions.

- (2′) and (3″) seem true, but (2″) and (3′) seem false
- If you think that Sobel's argument is unsuccessful, then you already seem to be committed to fatalism.
- If successful, Sobel's argument shows that both the branching and the Oaklander response to LEM are not necessary to rebut fatalism.