

Handout 5: Logical Fatalism

Logical Fatalism is, roughly, the view that no acts are free because before they were performed it was already true that they would be performed.

(Incidentally, *Theological Fatalism* is (roughly) the view that no acts are free because before they were performed God already knew that they would be performed. Those who endorse the argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and our freedom [i.e., the main Argument from Handout 4] are Theological Fatalists. We can call that argument the *Theological Fatalist's Argument*.)

The Logical Fatalist's Argument:

1. I clap my hands at noon today.

[supposition]

2. Necessarily, if I clap my hands at noon today, then it was true in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today.

[In support of this premise, imagine that someone made a *prediction* in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today. If I do in fact clap at noon, we would say his prediction was *correct* – that it was a *true prediction*. But if his prediction in 1000 A.D. was a true prediction then, then it seems that what it was a prediction of (i.e., that I would clap at noon today) had to be true then.

This premise corresponds to the premise in the Theological Fatalist's Argument that if I clap my hands at noon today, then *God knew* in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today. Where the Theological Fatalist's Argument talks about *God's past knowledge*, the Logical Fatalist's Argument talks about *past truth*.]

3. If it was true in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today, then it was never within my power to prevent its being true in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today.

[This is supposed to be supported by the Fixity of the Past (which is also used in the Theological Fatalist's Argument). Since we have no power over the past, we have no power over what was true in 1000 A.D., including that it was true then that I would clap my hands at noon today.]

4. Therefore, it was never within my power to prevent its being true in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today.

[from lines 2, 3, and 4]

5. Its being true in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today entails that I clap my hands at noon today.

[This is trivially true. It's an instance of a principle that we could call "Truth Entails Truth": if something is true, then it is true.

Again, where the Theological Fatalist's Argument appealed to *knowledge* (in this case, the principle that knowledge entails truth), the Logical Fatalist's Argument appeals to *truth* (in this case, the "principle" that truth entails truth.)]

6. If (4) and (5), then it was never within my power to avoid clapping my hands at noon today.

[instance of TP (the Transfer of Powerlessness Principle, just as in the Theological Fatalist's Argument). Any fact necessarily connected with a fact that has the necessity of the past itself has the necessity of the past.]

7. If it was never within my power to avoid clapping my hands at noon today, then I did not clap my hands freely.

[instance of FRP (the claim that Freedom Requires the Power to do otherwise), just as in the Theological Fatalist's Argument)]

8. Therefore, I did not clap my hands freely.

[from lines 4, 5, 6, and 7]

The Problem with the Logical Fatalist's Argument:

Something must be wrong with this argument. It seems to many that what's wrong with it can be expressed in the following way: although it was true in 1000 A.D. that I would clap my hands at noon today, this doesn't make me clap my hands at noon today; rather it is my clapping my hands at noon today that makes it true in 1000 A.D. that I clap my hands at noon today. The "determination relation" goes from today at noon back into the past, not *vice versa*.

If that is right, then what seems to follow is that there is a sense in which *I have power over the past* – so the Principle of the Fixity of the Past is false, along with the premise (premise 3) that is based on it. I have the power at noon today to affect something about 1000 A.D. – namely, whether it was true then I clap my hands at noon today.

Assuming (as Premise 1 states) that I will in fact clap my hands at noon today, then although it follows that it was true in 1000 A.D. that I clap my hands at noon today, I still retain the power to do otherwise at noon today. Although I will in fact clap, I am able to refrain from clapping. And since I have that ability, I have the ability to change the past. I have the power to make it so that what is in fact a truth about 1000 A.D. would not have been a truth.