

Logical Fatalism: Origins as Essential Properties of Events

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ABSTRACT

Logical fatalism is the belief that all events which occur do so necessarily, making the future necessarily fixed. I defend an argument in favor of this position against an attack Joseph Diekemper presents in his article "Temporal Necessity and Logical Fatalism." Diekemper argues that the fatalist argument in question rests on a faulty relationship between *de dicto* statements (truth statements about propositions) and *de re* statements (truth statements about objects). I argue Diekemper's attack confuses epistemological necessity and metaphysical necessity. In order to make this argument, I invoke a theory of origins of objects developed by Saul Kripke and apply it to events. I develop the idea that past and present events are origins of future events and that these origins are essential properties of future events. The invocation of origins as essential properties of events, I argue, also serves as a sufficient answer to the modal fallacy often charged against Aristotle's famous sea-battle argument. I conclude by restating the original logical fatalist argument with the addition of my development of origins as essential properties of events. By doing this, I show that the logical fatalist still presents a problem for anti-fatalists despite Diekemper's argument against it.

KEYWORDS

Logical Fatalism, Saul Kripke, Essential Properties, Determinism, Joseph Diekemper, Time, Temporal, Necessity, Contingency, Aristotle, Modal Fallacy

Logical fatalism is the belief that whatever happens could not have happened any other way. The view holds that future events are necessarily fixed and cannot be avoided. Joseph Diekemper, in his article "Temporal Necessity and Logical Fatalism," argues against a fatalist argument. First the fatalist argument assumes that past events are necessarily fixed (they cannot change). Then it assumes that it is presently time t_2 and that the following proposition is true: "At t_1 it was the case that at t_3 event X will occur." As stated above, the past is necessary, and therefore this true proposition which regards the past is *necessarily* true. Since this necessarily true proposition about the past entails the occurrence of X at t_3 , it is also necessarily true at t_2 that event X will happen at t_3 . Therefore, the logical fatalist claims, the future is fixed because true statements uttered in the past regarding the future are necessarily true. Diekemper not only attacks this argument, but he argues that a sincere fatalist is unlikely to make it because it rests on a faulty notion regarding the relationship between *propositions* about the necessity of an event and the *event itself*. For him, the purpose of critiquing this fatalist argument is to provide guidance for other anti-fatalists, encouraging them to shift their argumentative strategy. However, I argue that Diekemper is too quick to dismiss this argument. Indeed, his motivation to do so rests on a confusion between epistemological necessity and metaphysical necessity. Instead, I utilize a concept of origins as essential properties developed by Saul Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* to defend the logical fatalist argument. Essentially, my argument is as follows: for any event X, the past events which cause X to occur are essential properties of X. The existence of X requires the existence of its essential properties exactly as they actually do exist, or else X would not be X. Thus, since X's essential properties are necessary, and since X would not exist without said necessary properties, X occurs necessarily.

In order to debunk Diekemper's argument against fatalism, I must first explain exactly what his argument is. An event is an object insofar as it is a "state of affairs," as Diekemper puts it. For an event to come into existence is for an event to occur. For Diekemper, it seems impossible to make any meaningfully true statements about objects which do not exist and have never existed. The above fatalist argument, Diekemper claims, does not prove anything regarding the necessity of future events. Instead, it misconstrues the relationship between statements about *objects* and statements about *propositions*. The distinction between these two types of statements is known as the *de re/de dicto* distinction. *De re*

statements regard truth claims of objects; *de dicto* statements regard truth claims of propositions. An example of a *de re* claim is "Jeremy Morris wears a ponytail" (i.e., a claim about Jeremy Morris himself). This example's corresponding *de dicto* claim is "The proposition 'Jeremy Morris wears a ponytail' is true" (i.e., a claim about a *proposition* which regards Jeremy Morris). Diekemper points out that the above fatalist argument utilizes a *de dicto* statement about the past to prove the truth of a *de re* statement about the future. The following is a *de dicto* claim: "At t2, the statement 'at t1, it was necessary that at t3, event X will occur,' is true." Diekemper argues this *de dicto* claim is nonsensical because its corresponding *de re* claim has not been "actualised." In his own words, the state of affairs of event X "does not occur or become actualised at t1." Indeed, it is not until the event occurs at t3 that the *de dicto* claim about the statement made at t1 is made true. According to Diekemper, "temporal necessity *de dicto* only seems to apply - if it applies at all - derivatively, and in virtue of its *de re* application" (Diekemper 292). In short, it is the occurrence of event X at t3 - i.e., the existence of event X *de re* - which determines the truth value of the *de dicto* proposition. Thus, Diekemper says, the logical fatalist cannot use truth of the *de dicto* proposition regarding a future event to prove the necessary existence of said future event. It is the event's occurrence which makes the statement true, not the other way around.

Unfortunately for Diekemper, his argument rests on a confusion of epistemological necessity and metaphysical necessity. In order to illustrate how this confusion arises in his argument, I invoke Kripke's theory of origins as essential properties. By "essential property," I mean any property of an object that, without said property, would cause the object to cease existing. Kripke points out that an object can be discovered and referred to despite incomplete knowledge of the essential properties of said object. It is not the case that for all objects a person must know the essential properties of said object in order to successfully refer to it. Kripke provides the example of gold. People can refer to gold without knowing its essential property of containing the element with atomic number 79. Ignorance of said essential property does not make the property non-essential. Take the example of a particular glove. I point to the glove and say "Look at that glove," thus successfully referring to it. Upon further examination of the glove, I discover it is made of leather, making it a leather glove. The fact that the leather glove is made of leather is an essential property of this particular glove. Without the property of being made of leather, it would be a *different* glove altogether.

Now take this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion. Not only is it necessary that this particular glove be made of leather, but it is necessary that it be made of the leather it is actually made of. If the particular glove I refer to is made of leather made from cow skin derived from a cow in Wyoming, then any glove I refer to which is made of cow skin from a *different* cow in, say, Russia, would be a different glove entirely. Although I may not *know* the origins of the glove I refer to, the fact that there is a particular and unique glove I can refer to means there exists a glove with *particular and unique origins*. Herein lies the possibility of making an epistemological/metaphysical confusion of the same sort I believe Diekemper makes within his analysis of the logical fatalist argument above. Consider the statement "it is possible that the glove over there is made of cotton." Assume the person who utters this statement does not know and therefore has no belief as to what material this glove is made of. One can consider the speaker's statement as an expression containing *epistemological* ignorance. However, suppose it is discovered that the glove is actually made of leather. *Metaphysically*, since origins of an object are essential properties, it is *not* possible that this particular glove could have been made of cotton. Similarly, the statement "At t2, the statement 'at t1, event X will occur at t3' is necessarily true" is either metaphysically false or metaphysically true, regardless of one's ignorance regarding its truth value.

So, Diekemper mistakenly characterizes as metaphysically contingent the *de dicto* statement which claims that event X will occur and is made in the past. This mistake is made clear when the origins of event X are elicited. The existence of any event as *an object* is merely, as Diekemper puts it, an actualisation of a state of affairs. Put another way, it is the occurrence of an event which makes it exist as an object. The origins of any event X seem to me to be what *caused* event X to occur. For example, if one were to ask "What caused the birth of Don Juan," one could reply, "the fertilization of a certain egg as well as the carrying-out of certain biological functions, etc." Here it is made clear that what *causes* any event to occur is the occurrence of past events in a certain order. The state of affairs which caused "the publication of *Hamlet*" to occur was the conception by Shakespeare of a certain story at such and such a time, followed by the state of affairs known as "the writing of *Hamlet*," etc. Although the exact origins or causes of any event may be unknowable, the existence of such origins is inescapable. As Kripke illustrates, the origins of an object are essential to its existence. While discussing a particular table made of wood, he asks, "What, then, does the intuition that the table might

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have turned out to have been made of ice or anything else, that it might even have turned out not to be made of molecules, amount to? I think that it means simply that there might have been a *table* looking and feeling just like this one and placed in this very position in the room, which was in fact made of ice" (Kripke 142). In the same way, if any different causal chain of events had actually occurred leading up to the point in time of event X occurring, then it would not have been event X which ended up existing, but instead *an* event. Thus it is established that if event X exists, then its causes must necessarily exist in the way they actually do. Since the causes of event X are past events, then the past must be fixed. Thus, the statement made at t2, "At t1, it was true that at t3, event X will occur" is either true or false. The occurrence of event X is not necessary to determine the *de dicto* statement's truth value. Another way of putting it:

1. Any object which is unique must have unique origins.
2. Every event is a unique object (an actualised state of affairs).
3. Every event has unique origins (from 1, 2).
4. The unique origins of an event are the objects and processes which cause the event to occur.
5. The objects and processes which cause an event to occur is its causal history of past events.
6. For any unique object which exists, the existence of its essential properties is necessary (because without the existence of said properties, the object would no longer exist).
7. The origins of a unique object are included as part of its essential properties.
8. The existence of any event requires the existence of its origins (past events) necessarily.

9. Particular unique events exist.

10. Thus, the past is necessarily fixed (from 8, 9).

Since past events are necessarily fixed, the *de dicto* statement made at t_2 , "At t_1 , it is the case that event X will occur at t_3 " is either necessarily true or necessarily false. The occurrence of event X at t_3 is not necessary to metaphysically determine the statement's truth value, but it is what allows for the *discovery* of the *de dicto* statement's truth value (this discovery represents what Kripke would call a "necessary *a posteriori*" fact).

Think of what it would take for the *de dicto* statement in question to be true *before* t_3 . It would have to be the case that at t_1 , a state of affairs exists which will eventually allow for event X to occur. The occurrence of event X requires a certain set of unique essential properties to exist, and these properties will either include the state of affairs at t_1 or they will not. Suppose the occurrence of event X *does* require the state of affairs at t_1 to exist. At this point, it seems possible that the state of affairs at t_1 could produce *multiple* different causal chains which may or may not lead to the occurrence of event X. Perhaps at t_1 there are multiple logically consistent ways for the causal chain of history to proceed, some of which will cause event X to occur at t_3 , and some of which will not. Whichever way the causal chain of history proceeds may be left up to a numerical probability. Well, if this is the case, then how is any probability actualized? For the sake of this example, presume the probabilities of each possible course of action are equal with one another. How, then, does any option actually become part of the causal chain of history? If one answers, "it is pure luck. No matter which option wins out, it does not negate the fact that the other options also had a meaningfully real chance of happening," then I am left asking, "Well, what were the circumstances that allowed one option to be 'more lucky' than the others?" If one accepts that each effect has a cause, then the result of every instance of temporal probability must have a cause. One might say, "well, any of the probable outcomes could have happened, and they all would have been caused by the same previous chain of events; it's just that only one option was *actually* caused by this chain." To which I reply, "Well, if all the possible outcomes could have been caused by the same chain of events, yet only one outcome was caused by this chain, does that not entail the existence of some other aspect of the existing state of affairs which would produce one outcome and exclude others?" What I mean to say

is, the existence of any state of affairs at the expense of another state of affairs seems to imply a causal circumstance which produced the *actually* existing event as opposed to the *possibly* existing events. And again, once an actually existing object is discovered, one can inquire into its essential properties, such as its origins. No matter what “probabilities” may have existed at one point in time, the fact of an actually existing event implies the existence of some cause which allowed *that* event to exist instead of another. Whatever this cause is, it must belong to the event’s essential properties because, evidently, if this cause did not exist, neither would the event. This cause, whether it be an event, another object, a relationship, or etc., is part of the state of affairs/causal historical chain which are all part of the event’s origins. These origins, including the one which produced one “probability” over another, are all fixed in the past, and thus they produce fixed outcomes.

Before I conclude, I will address a criticism of my argument which I received at the 2016 Michigan Undergraduate Philosophy Conference. Essentially, an audience member suggested my argument may commit a fallacy similar to the one Aristotle’s sea-battle argument is often accused of making. The fallacy is often called the “modal fallacy.” In logical language, the modal fallacy is an instance of an unwarranted application of the necessity operator. The article entitled “Fatalism” from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy presents a version of Aristotle’s sea-battle argument:

Suppose that (i) p is true or p is false and (ii) not- p is true or not- p

is false.

Then p is true or not- p is true.

Now suppose that in 1900 one person says that a sea-battle will take place on 1/1/2100, and another says that a sea-battle will not take place on 1/1/2100.

Then either what the first person says is true or what the second person says is true.

compos mentis

But, in that case, either it is necessary in 1900 that a sea-battle takes place on 1/1/2100, or it is necessary in 1900 that one does not take place.

But the date of the predictions is irrelevant, and it is irrelevant whether any prediction is actually made at all.

So it is necessary at all times that a sea-battle takes place on 1/1/2100, or that a sea-battle does not take place on 1/1/2100.

But the argument can evidently be generalised.

So, everything that happens, happens of necessity.

The misplacement of necessity Aristotle is accused of: the move from claiming that it is true that someone says "a sea-battle will take place on 1/1/2100," to claiming to be also *necessarily* true. Essentially, the modal fallacy asserts that there is no reason to think the true statement (whichever one it is) is true *of necessity*. Another way of putting it: just because one of the two statements will become true in 2100 does not mean that either is necessarily true; it is *not* necessary that either the sea-battle will or the sea-battle will not take place in 2100. However, the entire purpose of my argument is to prove that there *is* reason to think the statements made in the past - as well as the future event it mentions - are either true or false of necessity. As explained above, if all states of affairs are caused by previous states of affairs, and if previous states of affairs are fixed, then it follows that the events caused by past events are also fixed. The argument that a set of events can cause multiple different events is false because, as I argued above, the actualization of one of many "possible" events implies the existence of some other cause that caused the actualized state of affairs to exist. This other cause can be considered one of the event's origins and hence one of its essential properties. Given that the origins of event X exist in a fixed way, and given that a different set of origins would need to exist for a different event to exist in place of event X, it follows that if event X exists, then it does so necessarily. Therefore, instead of committing a modal fallacy, my argument takes the question raised by a modal fallacy accusation and answers it.

In conclusion, Diekemper too quickly discards the logical fatalist argument in question. What this fatalist argument really boils down to is this: *events contain essential properties such as origins. These origins are past events. Without the existence of these past events as is, any actually existing event caused by them would not exist. One can say "At t2, the statement 'at t1, it was the case that at t3, event X will happen' is true." If this de dicto statement is true, then it is true because of a current state of affairs which will necessitate the occurrence of event X. Since the statement about t3 made at t1 is necessarily true or false, so is the occurrence of event X. The same can be said for any future event, and therefore the future is fixed.* Unless an anti-fatalist can explain how an event's existence can be said to be contingent despite being caused by necessarily fixed events, then the argument Diekemper attempts to do away with still presents a problem.

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