



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
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Time for Freedom

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Setup

- In this talk will argue that determinism alone is not the sole factor to decide whether agents could possibly have the power to do otherwise, but that temporal ontology and the nature of laws are more fundamental.
- Traditionally, the views on free will have been categorised along their compatibility with determinism, as determinism is taken to exclude the possibility of real alternative future courses of events.
- I will argue that, depending on temporal ontology and your view on laws, determinism is neither sufficient nor necessary for the absence of real alternatives.

Outline

- Views on Time and Freedom
- Determinism
- Freedom and the Open Future
- Where to go from here? Doing Otherwise in Eternalism

Views on Time, Views on Freedom

- Classical incompatibilism
 - Freedom requires the power to do otherwise: In order to be free, there need to be at least two real alternatives present to the agent and the agent is able to bring either of them about.

 - Alternative: A possible development of the world h and another possible development of the world h' are real alternatives at time t , *iff* h and h' have an identical content until t [and a different content after t]. (Strobach 2007, 56)

 - Classically, the existence of real alternatives is taken to be incompatible with determinism.

Views on Time, Views on Freedom

- Classical compatibilism:
 - Freedom does not require the power to do otherwise (ignoring conditional analyses for now).
 - To be free, an action needs to be caused or endorsed in the right way by the agent's desires and preferences.
 - This is compatible with there not being real alternatives in the sense introduced above.

Views on Time, Views on Freedom

- Eternalism
 - Static:
 - past, present and future facts are equally real.
 - There is no objective, progressing present. You listening to this talk is as real as the sinking of the titanic and the heat-death of the universe. None of these events are ontologically special.
 - Dynamic (Moving Spotlight View):
 - past, present and future facts are equally real.
 - There is a progressing, objective present.

- Future (or, from our standpoint later) facts are as timelessly the case as this time is. The “future” is ontologically settled.

Views on Time, Views on Freedom

- Presentism
 - Only the present facts are real. You listening to this talk is ontologically special. Past and future facts are not real.
 - There is an objective, progressing present.
 - Future facts are not real (yet).
 - We will see below whether that means that the future is open.

Views on Time, Views on Freedom

- Growing Block View
 - Mix of eternalism and presentism: past and present facts are real, future ones are not.
 - There is an objective, progressing present.
 - As the present progresses, more facts are added to the growing block of past and present facts.
 - We will see below whether that means that the future is open.

Determinism

- Let's for the time being take determinism very broadly as the thesis that any complete state of the universe at any time t together with the laws of nature \mathcal{L} uniquely fixes the state of the universe at any later time after t .
- This appears to entail that if determinism is true, there are no alternatives in the sense introduced above.

But:

- I will argue that determinism alone is neither necessary nor sufficient for there not being real alternatives.

Freedom and the Open Future

- Not necessary:
- In some temporal ontologies, and some views on laws, the future facts might be settled even if determinism is false.
- In eternalism, the future facts are already settled. There are no real alternatives at any time.
- But does that fact trivially imply determinism?
- Not necessarily. The laws might still be non-strict: there might be laws which, together with the state of the universe at any time t do not uniquely fix the state of the universe at any later time.
- **And still, the future are fixed in the sense that the future facts are timelessly the case.**

Freedom and the Open Future

- Not sufficient:

- This is less straightforward. Whether determinism is sufficient for the lack of real alternatives depends on
 - 1) Temporal ontology
 - 2) The exact definition of determinism

Freedom and the Open Future

- Two straightforward situations:
 - 1) Determinism in eternalist views: The future is fixed.
 - 2) Necessitarianism and certain dynamic temporal ontologies.
 - Briggs and Forbes (2017): necessitarian growing block view in which facts that are the case *now* restrict the range of possibilities for the future. If it is a fact now that necessarily, ferromagnets attract iron, then this restricts future alternatives to those in which ferromagnets attract iron.
 - In such a view, determinism would imply the absence of real alternatives.

Freedom and the Open Future

- Slightly less straightforward situation:
- Take, e.g., a temporal ontology with an unreal future, combined with a non-necessitarian view on laws, e.g. a Humean GBT. (Backmann 2016)
- In any Humean view, the laws supervene on the totality of facts, meaning that either:
 - Laws supervene on the totality of all past, present, and future facts: there are no laws until the end of time, because there are no future facts (yet for the laws to supervene on).
 - Laws supervene on all facts that are real at any *present* time (the past and present facts). In this case, there could be laws before the end of time.

Freedom and the Open Future

- In both cases, the Humean laws could be in some sense deterministic:
 - For 1) If, at the end of time, all laws are strict, then the state of the universe at any past time in the block and the laws uniquely determine the state of the universe at any later time.
 - For 2) The laws up until any non-present time t could be strict such that the state of the universe at t and the laws uniquely determine the state of the universe at any time after t **up until the present.**

Freedom and the Open Future

- But, crucially, in both versions, at any present time t , the past or present states of the universe and the laws do *not* uniquely determine the state of the universe at any *future* time, because
 - Either there are no laws yet, or
 - The laws do not apply to the future, because future facts are not part of the supervenience base.
- In a sense, we could have deterministic laws that do not, at any present non-final time t , restrict *future* alternatives.

Where does that leave us?

- Views on freedom that require the power to do otherwise require real alternatives, which classically are taken to be incompatible with determinism.
- There are temporal ontologies in which determinism can be false but still there are no real alternatives.
- There are temporal ontologies that feature strict, deterministic laws that do not restrict future alternatives.
- Determinism alone does not determine whether there are real alternatives. Views on freedom should be categorised according to whether they are compatible with *a fixed future*, not just with determinism alone.

Where to go from here? Doing Otherwise in Eternalism

- So far, we have only talked about classification and terminology.
- But that is boring! I want to know whether I am free or not!
- So the remaining question is: can I be free in a suitably robust sense even in eternalism with its fixed future?
- Spoiler: It is not just that, but *how* the future is fixed that should matter for freedom.
- Whether the future is just timelessly the case or whether the future is necessitated by the state of the universe and the laws makes a difference (Backmann 2013, Beebe and Mele 2002)



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Thank you for your attention!

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