



FREE WILL

VS.

FATE

&

FOREKNOWLEDGE

is fate real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the fatalist
argument

three ways
out

Our first topic today is the oldest challenge to the existence of free will: the challenge to freedom that comes from **fate**.

What does it mean to believe in fate? To believe in fate is to believe that there are now truths about all of the future actions that any of us will undertake.

So, for example, if fate is real then it is already true now that you will marry a certain person, on a certain date, at a certain time. Or, to pick a more grim example, there is already a truth about the exact moment you will die, and how.

We might imagine that all of the facts about your life — past, present, and future — are written down in a dusty book in a library somewhere. Of course, there is no such book. But, if fate is real, then there could be. The truths are all there, whether or not they have been written down.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

We might imagine that all of the facts about your life — past, present, and future — are written down in a dusty book in a library somewhere. Of course, there is no such book. But, if fate is real, then there could be. The truths are all there, whether or not they have been written down.

So let's ask the question: is there such a thing as fate?

is fate
real?

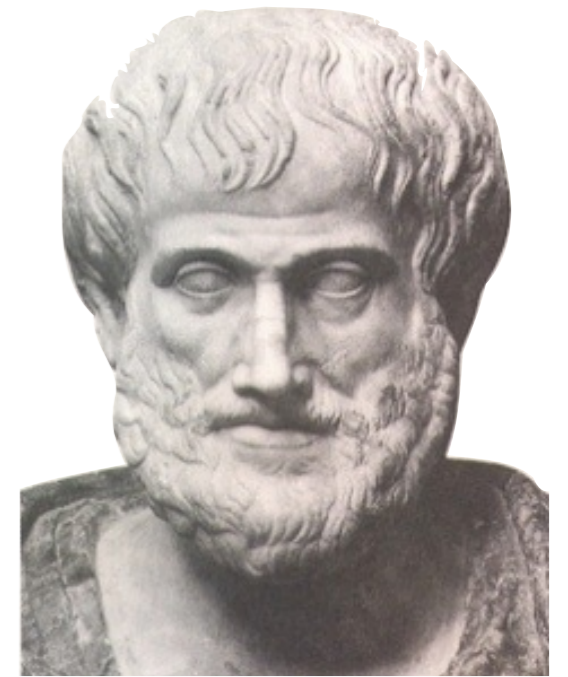
the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

So let's ask the question: is there such a thing as fate?

Here is an argument that there is, from the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle.



“... if all propositions whether positive or negative are either true or false . . . so if one man affirms that an event of a given character will take place and another denies it, it is plain that the statement of the one will correspond with reality and that of the other will not.

Aristotle's argument begins with a statement of the following logical principle:

The law of the excluded middle
Every proposition is either true
or false.

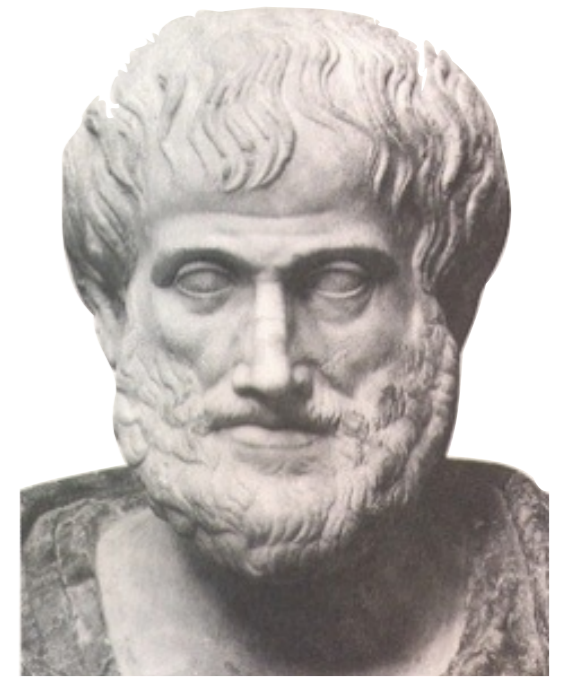
is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

The law of the excluded middle
Every proposition is either true
or false.



Suppose that this is true. Why think that it implies that there are truths about every action that we will perform in the future? Aristotle gives us the following argument:

Again, to say that neither the affirmation nor the denial is true, maintaining, let us say, that an event neither will take place nor will not take place, is to take up a position impossible to defend. ... if an event is neither to take place nor not to take place the next day ... it would be necessary that a sea-fight should neither take place nor fail to take place on the next day.”

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

The law of the excluded middle
Every proposition is either true
or false.

To see what Aristotle is thinking, let's look at two propositions about a possible future free action of yours.

You will not get married
on June 1, 2027.

You will get married on
June 1, 2027.

If the law of the excluded middle is true, then each of these claims is either true or false. Obviously, both cannot be true, since that is a contradiction.

Could both be false? If they were, Aristotle points out, it follows that you will not get married on that date (the negation of the first) and that it is not true that you will not get married on that date (the negation of the second). But that is a contradiction too.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

The law of the excluded middle
Every proposition is either true
or false.

You will not get married
on June 1, 2027.

You will get married on
June 1, 2027.

So it must be that, if the law of the excluded middle is true, then one of these claims is true, and one of them is false.

But to endorse this is just to believe in fate, since it is to say that there is now a truth about whether you will get married on that day.

And nothing depended on this particular choice of an example. So, for any possible future action of yours, there is now a truth about whether and when you will perform it, and fate is real.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

And nothing depended on this particular choice of an example. So, for any possible future action of yours, there is now a truth about whether and when you will perform it, and fate is real.

We might call this the **logical** argument for fate:

THE LOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR FATE

1. Every proposition is either true or false. (Law of the Excluded Middle)
2. Either it is true that you will get married on 6/1/27 or it is false that you will get married on 6/1/27. (1)
3. If it is false that you will be married on 6/1/27, it is true that you will not get married on 6/1/27.
4. Either it is true that you will get married on 6/1/27 or it is true that you will not get married on 6/1/27. (2,3)

C. There are truths about what you will do on 6/1/27. (4)

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

A second argument for the reality of fate is based, not on logic alone, but on certain widely held views about God.

It is widely held that God is omniscient, and also widely held that (for this reason) God knows what actions you will perform in the future.

But if God knows what actions you will perform in the future, there must be truths about what actions you will perform in the future (otherwise there would be nothing for God to know).

We can put this together into the **theological** argument for fate.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

We can put this together into the **theological** argument for fate.

THE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR FATE

1. God knows what actions you will perform in the future.
2. If God knows what actions you will perform in the future, there are truths about what actions you will perform in the future.

C. There are truths about what actions you will perform in the future. (1,2)

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

We now have two candidate facts, either of which might make trouble for the reality of free will.

Fate: there are truths about everything you will do in the future.

Foreknowledge: God knows everything about what you will do in the future.

One might of course accept the reality of fate without accepting the reality of foreknowledge.

Our question is: do either fate or foreknowledge pose a serious challenge to the reality of free will?

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

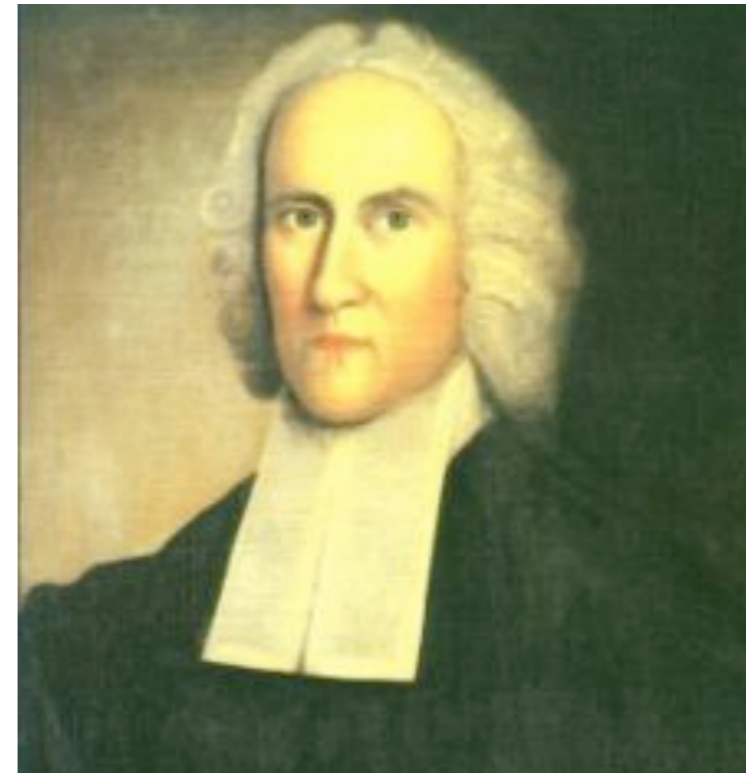
three ways out

Our question is: do either fate or foreknowledge pose a serious challenge to the reality of free will?

They do. The best way to see how this argument might work is to start with the challenge posed by God's foreknowledge of our actions. We'll come back to fate after that.

The argument we're going to talk about is due to Jonathan Edwards.

Edwards was an 18th century American philosopher, theologian and preacher, perhaps best known now for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God."



is fate
real?

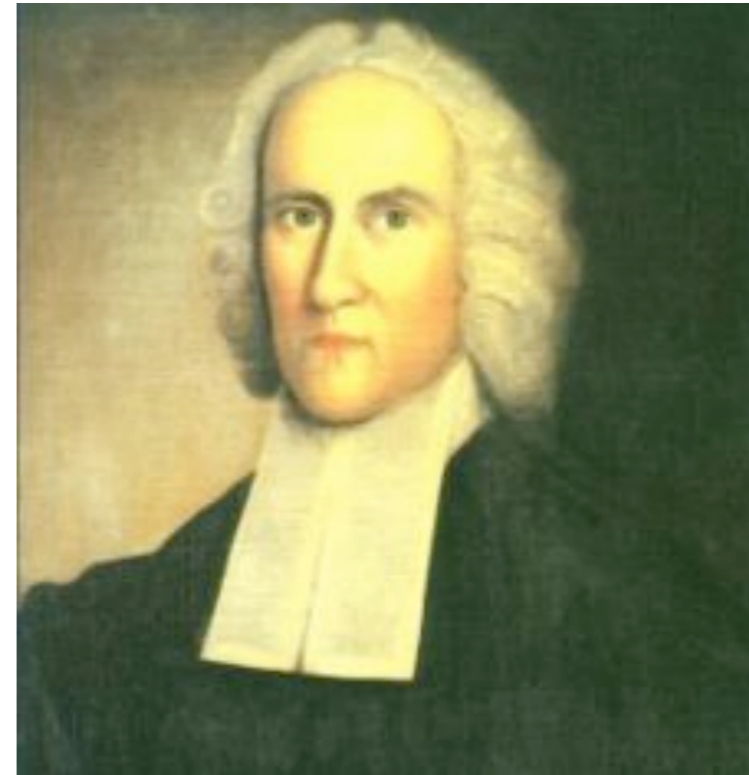
the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

The argument we're going to talk about is due to Jonathan Edwards.

Edwards was an 18th century American philosopher, theologian and preacher, perhaps best known now for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God."



Edwards lays out his argument in four numbered paragraphs, each of which corresponds to a premise in his argument.

The first is this one:

“1. I observed before, in explaining the nature of necessity, that in things which are past, their past existence is now necessary: having already made sure of existence, it is too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect ... ”

In other words:

1. We have no choice about past events.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

“1. I observed before, in explaining the nature of necessity, that in things which are past, their past existence is now necessary: having already made sure of existence, it is too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect ... ”

1. We have no choice about past events.

“2. If there be any such thing as a divine foreknowledge of the volitions of free agents, that foreknowledge ... is a thing which already has, and long ago had, existence; and so, now its existence is necessary.”

What is Edwards saying here?

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

“1. I observed before, in explaining the nature of necessity, that in things which are past, their past existence is now necessary: having already made sure of existence, it is too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect ... ”

“2. If there be any such thing as a divine foreknowledge of the volitions of free agents, that foreknowledge ... is a thing which already has, and long ago had, existence; and so, now its existence is necessary.”

Premises 1 and 2 of Edwards' argument imply a further claim about the status of God's foreknowledge of our actions.

1. We have no choice about past events.

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

1. We have no choice about past events.

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

“3. It is also very manifest, that those things which are indissolubly connected with other things that are necessary, are themselves necessary.”

As elsewhere, Edwards is using “necessary” to mean, in part “beyond our control” or “something we don't have any choice about.” If we focus on this, then Edwards' point here looks very similar to the principle which we discussed last time in the consequence argument:

4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

1. We have no choice about past events.

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.

There is one more premise in Edwards' argument which needs discussion.

“4. It is no less evident, that if there be a full, certain, and infallible foreknowledge of the future existence of the volitions of moral agents, then there is a certain infallible and indissoluble connection between those events and that foreknowledge.”

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

“4. It is no less evident, that if there be a full, certain, and infallible foreknowledge of the future existence of the volitions of moral agents, then there is a certain infallible and indissoluble connection between those events and that foreknowledge.”

Edwards is saying that there is an **indissoluble** connection between something being known, and its being true. An indissoluble connection is one that cannot be broken.

But if the connection between God knowing that I will do X and me doing X is unbreakable, that implies:

5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

1. We have no choice about past events.

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.

5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

But now focus on premises 3, 4, and 5.

Premise 3 mentions something that we have no choice about.

Premise 5 says that we have no choice about the fact that if that thing occurs, then we will perform some action in the future.

Premise 4 says that if both those things are the case, then we also have no choice about that future action.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

1. We have no choice about past events.

2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.

5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

But then it seems to follow that:

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions.

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past events.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.
5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past events.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.
5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

It is tempting to reply to the Foreknowledge Argument by saying that while God does know what we are going to do, God does not **make** us do anything.

But suppose that that is true. Does that call into question any of the premises of the argument?

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past events.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.
5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

We'll soon consider some possible responses to Edwards' argument.

But before we do that, let's ask: can we come up with an argument similar to the Foreknowledge Argument which is based, not on foreknowledge, but on fate?

We can.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past events.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.
5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

We can.

Notice that the only independent premises which say anything about God's foreknowledge are (2) and (5).

What happens if we replace those with premises that just talk about there being truths about the future?

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past events.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.
5. We have no choice about the fact that if God knows that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

THE FATALIST ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past events.
2. In the past, there were truths about our future actions.
3. We have no choice about the truth that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.
5. We have no choice about the fact that if it is true that we will perform some action, then we will perform that action.

C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

THE FATALIST ARGUMENT

1. We have no choice about past events.
 2. In the past, **there were truths about** our future actions.
 3. We have no choice about the truth that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)
 4. If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.
 5. We have no choice about the fact that **if it is true that we will perform some action,** then we will perform that action.
-
- C. We have no choice about whether we will perform our future actions. (3,4,5)

Like the Foreknowledge Argument, the Fatalist Argument is a serious challenge to the reality of freedom of the will.

The only changed premises are (2) and (5) — and both of these look plausible.

And of course one can't escape the Fatalist Argument by denying that God exists, or denying that God knows what we will do in the future. All we need is the existence of fate — of truths about the future.

Let's turn to the question of how the believer in free will might reply to these arguments.

First, let's list the substantial assumptions which are common to **both** arguments.

There are truths about our future actions.

We have no choice about the past.

If we have no choice about A, and no choice about the connection between A and B, then we have no choice about B.

There is also one substantial assumption made only by the Foreknowledge Argument:

In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

Let's begin with this one, before turning to the assumptions common to both arguments.

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

In the past, God
had
foreknowledge of
our future
actions.

One person who has no trouble rejecting this assumption is the atheist. If God does not exist, then God is not around to know about our future actions. So the Foreknowledge Argument is only a real challenge to free will if you think that God exists.

But could the theist deny this assumption?

One way to deny it would be to deny the existence of fate — in that case there would be no truths about our actions for God to know. I'll come back to that idea.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

But there is also another way to reject this assumption, which is expressed in this quote from Aquinas:

“although contingent things become actual successively, nevertheless God knows contingent things not successively, as they are in their own being, as we do, but simultaneously. The reason is because His knowledge is measured by eternity, as is also His being; and eternity being simultaneously whole comprises all time, as said above ... Hence all things that are in time are present to God from eternity ... because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality.”

Aquinas is saying that God does not come to know things as they happen, in time; rather, God (in some sense) exists outside of time. To God, all things that happen in time are seen “in their presentiality.”

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

In the past, God
had
foreknowledge of
our future
actions.

To get a grip on this, imagine that one learned of another universe, which had its own system of time and space. And suppose one was given all of the information about everything that ever happens in that universe, and the time at which it happens. So, in particular, you know everything about every free action in that universe. But it's not like you knew of every action **before** that action occurred — you don't exist in the time of that universe.

Does the claim that God exists outside of time give us reason to reject premise (2) of the foreknowledge argument?

Let's look again at the premises which make reference to time.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

Let's look again at the premises which make reference to time.

1. We have no choice about past events.
2. In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

Does the claim that God exists outside of time give us reason to reject premise (2) of the Foreknowledge Argument?

It does look like, if Aquinas' view is right, (2) is false. That is good for the defender of free will.

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

In the past, God had foreknowledge of our future actions.

It does look like, if Aquinas' view is right, (2) is false. That is good for the defender of free will.

But here is a challenge for someone who tries to get around the foreknowledge argument by adopting the view that God is outside of time. It looks like we could reformulate the relevant premises as follows:

- 1'. We have no choice about events which are **outside of time**.
- 2'. **Outside of time**, God had knowledge of our future actions.
3. We have no choice about God's knowing that in the future I will perform a certain action. (1,2)

And from there the argument can just go on as before. So the worry is that Aquinas' view gives us one way to block the Foreknowledge Argument, but that the argument can be easily reformulated so as to avoid the objection.

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

There are truths
about our future
actions.

We have no
choice about the
past.

If we have no choice
about A, and no
choice about the
connection between
A and B, then we
have no choice about
B.

Let's return to the three assumptions which are common to both arguments. For now, I am going to set aside the last of these — we'll come back to it next time.

Let's start by asking whether we might deny the existence of fate.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

There are truths
about our future
actions.

We started off with two arguments for the reality of fate.

The first was the Logical Argument for Fate, which was based on the Law of the Excluded Middle.

The law of the excluded middle
Every proposition is either true
or false.

But what if we denied this? Perhaps claims about future free actions — like claims about what you will eat for dinner tonight — are neither true nor false, but simply “undetermined.” They do not now have any truth-value (though they will later).

This is different than saying that claims about future actions are false — for if you say that some proposition P is false, then you are committed to the negation of P being true. (This is what allowed Aristotle to derive the contradiction in the argument discussed earlier.)

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

There are truths
about our future
actions.

This is different than saying that claims about future actions are false — for if you say that some proposition P is false, then you are committed to the negation of P being true. (This is what allowed Aristotle to derive the contradiction in the argument discussed earlier.)

Rather, on this sort of view, we say that both the proposition that you will marry person X and the proposition that you will not marry person X simply have no truth-value.

Here's a challenge to this kind of view. Suppose that you say to a friend, 'I bet Mariana is going to decide to major in philosophy.' And then suppose that, a month later, after long (free) deliberations, Mariana does indeed make the obviously correct choice and decides to major in philosophy. We would be inclined to say: 'What you said about Mariana **was** true.'

Doesn't this imply that there was already a truth about what Mariana was going to decide, back when you made the prediction?

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

There are truths
about our future
actions.

Now consider the second argument for fate which we discussed earlier: the theological argument. This is not an argument likely to trouble an atheist. But can the theist reasonably deny that God knows our future?

This view — that God exists, but does not know our future actions — is called **open theism**.

There are two central objections to open theism.

The first is just that it amounts to a denial of God's omniscience.

But here the open theist who thinks that claims about future actions have no truth-value has a not-unreasonable reply. She can say that she is not denying God's omniscience, because she is not denying that God knows all of the truths. She is just denying that there are any truths about future actions to be known (yet).

(A tricky question is whether you can still be this kind of open theist if you think that God exists outside of time.)

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

There are truths
about our future
actions.

There are two central objections to open theism.

The second central objection to open theism is more theological than philosophical. And this is just that it is hard to square the view that God does not know what we are going to do with certain features of the main monotheistic religions.

Various passages in both the Old and New Testaments (as well as in the Koran) seem to imply the existence of divine foreknowledge. Consider, for example the following well-known passage from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus is speaking to Peter:

**“Truly, I tell you, this very night,
before the rooster crows, you will
deny me three times.”**

One who denies divine foreknowledge seems forced into saying either that Jesus did not really know what he said to be true, or that Peter’s denial was not free.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

There are truths
about our future
actions.

Various passages in both the Old and New Testaments (as well as in the Koran) seem to imply the existence of divine foreknowledge. Consider, for example the following well-known passage from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus is speaking to Peter:

“Truly, I tell you, this very night,
before the rooster crows, you will
deny me three times.”

One who denies divine foreknowledge seems forced into saying either that Jesus did not really know what he said to be true, or that Peter’s denial was not free.

Perhaps there’s a way out. One might say that Peter’s decision was free, but that the relevant choice had already been freely made prior to Jesus’s saying this — so that the choice was free despite the action being determined at the time of Jesus’s statement.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

We have no choice about the past.

Let's turn to our last line of response to the two arguments. This is to deny the assumption, common to both arguments, that we have no choice about the past.

The denial of this assumption is often associated with William of Ockham, an English philosopher and theologian who was born about 15 years after Aquinas' death, in 1288. (He's the one that "Ockham's razor" is named after.)



To see why this might not be ridiculous, consider the overlooked philosophical problem of the incompatibility of free will and roommate belief.

It seems that sometimes, your roommate can have beliefs about what you will do; for example, the following might be true:

At 10 am today, your roommate believed that you would eat a salad for lunch.

is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

We have no
choice about the
past.

At 10 am today, your roommate
believed that you would eat a salad
for lunch.

Now imagine that at noon you are in the dining hall,
about to grab a salad, when you are suddenly overcome
with an unlikely desire for a fish sandwich. Do you have a
choice about whether you will choose the salad or the fish
sandwich? It seems that you do. **But then it also seems
that you have a choice about whether your
roommate's belief, at 10 am, was true.** After all, if
you choose the fish sandwich, your roommate's belief that
you would eat a salad will be false.

If this story makes sense, it follows that you do
sometimes have a choice about past facts: you had a
choice about whether, in the past, a certain belief
about your future actions was true.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out



We have no choice about the past.

If this story makes sense, it follows that you do sometimes have a choice about past facts: you had a choice about whether, in the past, a certain belief about your future actions was true.

Of course, this does not mean that you have a choice about **every** past fact. For example, you don't now have a choice about whether it rained yesterday. But consider the sorts of "past facts" at play in the Fatalist Argument.

They are facts like this:

In 2000 BC it was true that on 6/1/2027 you will get married.

This is a fact about the past; but it is also partly about the future. It is perhaps not so hard to believe that you will have a choice in 2027 about whether in 2000 BC this was a fact.



is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

They are facts like this:

We have no
choice about the
past.

In 2000 BC it was true that on
6/1/2027 you will get married.

This is a fact about the past; but it is also partly about the future. It is perhaps not so hard to believe that you will have a choice in 2027 about whether in 2000 BC this was a fact.

So perhaps Ockham's strategy of saying that we have a choice about some past facts helps with the Fatalist Argument. Does it help with the Foreknowledge Argument?

The kind of past facts at play in that argument are facts like this one:

In 2000 BC God knew that on
6/1/2027 you will get married.



is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out

We have no choice about the past.

So perhaps Ockham's strategy of saying that we have a choice about some past facts helps with the Fatalist Argument. Does it help with the Foreknowledge Argument?

The kind of past facts at play in that argument are facts like this one:

In 2000 BC God knew that on 6/1/2027 you will get married.

Let's return to the example about you having a choice about whether your roommate's belief was true.

In that case, you had the power to make your roommate's belief true, or make the belief false.

Will you, by analogy, have the power to make God's belief about your future actions false?



is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

We have no choice about the past.

In 2000 BC God knew that on 6/1/2027 you will get married.

Let's return to the example about you having a choice about whether your roommate's belief was true.

In that case, you had the power to make your roommate's belief true, or make the belief false.

Will you, by analogy, have the power to make God's belief about your future actions false?

Here the analogy appears to break down. God is (on standard views) infallible; it's impossible to make God make a mistake. So (if this is true) you couldn't have the power to make God's belief about your future actions false.

This does not show that this response to the Foreknowledge Argument fails. But it does show that we need some explanation of how it could be that in 2027 it could be up to you whether in 2000 BC God knew something.



is fate real?

the foreknowledge argument

the fatalist argument

three ways out

We've discussed two different, but related, challenges to the belief that we have free will. One is posed by fate; the other by God's knowledge of our future actions.

One can reply to both arguments by saying that there is no such thing as fate, and no such thing as divine foreknowledge. But both of those escape routes face challenges.

If you believe in free will, and accept the existence of fate and/or divine foreknowledge, you should think about what premise of the Fate and Foreknowledge Arguments you reject.

is fate
real?

the
foreknowledge
argument

the
fatalist
argument

three
ways out