

**Fatalism**  
After Richard Taylor

Nothing that will happen tomorrow is today within my power to prevent.

Suppose that were I to prepare the coffee maker today, I would have fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow.

And suppose that were I not to prepare the coffee maker today, I would not have fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow.

Suppose, that is, that

My preparing the coffee maker today is both sufficient and necessary for my having fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow.

Surely, then, it is today within my power to prevent my waking up without coffee tomorrow, for surely today it is both within my power to prepare the coffee maker and within my power not to prepare the coffee maker.

Now consider:

1. If fresh hot coffee is waiting for me tomorrow, then it is not within my power not to prepare the coffee maker today.

—For in case fresh hot coffee is waiting for me tomorrow, a necessary condition of my not preparing the coffee maker today is lacking, the condition, that is, of there being no fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow.

2. If fresh hot coffee is not waiting for me tomorrow, then it is not within my power to prepare the coffee maker today.

—For in case there is no fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow, a necessary condition of my preparing the coffee maker today is lacking, the condition, that is, of there being fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow.

3. But either there will be fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow morning or there won't.

Therefore:

4. Either it is not within my power today to prepare the coffee maker or it is not within my power today not to prepare the coffee maker.

Therefore:

5. It is false that it is both within my power today to prepare the coffee maker and within my power today not to prepare the coffee maker.

Therefore:

6. I am powerless to prevent today what will happen tomorrow with regard to fresh hot coffee.

If fresh hot coffee is waiting for me tomorrow, then today I am powerless to prevent there being fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow.

If fresh hot coffee is not waiting for me tomorrow, then today I am powerless to ensure that there be fresh hot coffee waiting for me tomorrow.

The argument generalized:

Where “Q” describes a specific event and “Q\*” describes any event that excludes Q, and where “O” describes an action such that were I to perform that action, Q would occur and where “O\*” describes an action such that were I to perform that action, Q\* would occur:

1. If “Q” is true, then it is not within my power to do O\*.

—For in case “Q” is true, then a necessary condition of my doing O\* is lacking, the condition, that is, of “Q\*” being true.

2. If “Q\*” is true, then it is not within my power to do O.

—For in case “Q\*” is true, then a necessary condition of my doing O is lacking, the condition, that is of “Q” being true.

3. But either “Q” is true or “Q\*” is true.

Therefore:

4. Either it is not within my power to do O or it is not within my power to do O\*.

Therefore:

5. It is not both within my power to do O and within my power not to do O.

Therefore:

6. I am powerless to prevent today what will happen with regard to whatever “Q” concerns.

What sort of action I perform today depends on what happens tomorrow.

### Objections

1) The argument supposes that a necessary condition for some present occurrence can be a future occurrence, that is, some event that has not yet occurred. But my waking up to fresh coffee tomorrow cannot be a necessary condition of my preparing the coffee maker today, for I haven't yet woken up tomorrow. An event can be a necessary condition for something else only if it either precedes that something else or is simultaneous with it.

—Response: If we accept this principle, we have to deny that if event A is sufficient for event B, then event B is necessary for event A. We want to be able to say of some events occurring today that they are sufficient for events that will occur tomorrow. But that would seem to commit us to saying that events that will occur tomorrow are necessary for events occurring today.

2) The argument depends on the presumption that either “Q” is true today or “Q\*” is true today, though the event in virtue of which one of them is true happens tomorrow.

Today “Q” is about the future. And that means that today its truth value is indeterminate. Today “Q” is neither true nor false. Only once tomorrow comes will “Q” be true or false, depending on whether the event it purports to describe occurs.

Without the presumption that a proposition about the future is already today either true or false, the inference to 4 fails, for without that presumption, the truth of “Q” is not a necessary condition of my doing O.

It is not within my power to make “Q” false once Q, but until that event occurs, it might well be in my power to prevent it from occurring, and so it might well today be up to me what happens tomorrow.

—Response: If a proposition regarding the future is not today either true or false, then the mere passage of time has causal powers.