METAPHYSICAL FATALISM, IN FIVE STEPS*

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I guess you could say everything’s a metaphor for everything else, but sometimes it’s just what it is. It’s just what it’s about—about a tree.

Tom Waits

Summary

The paper presents an argument for the conclusion that a certain conception of truth, according to which truth is timeless, truth-values are just two and the primary truth-bearers are propositions, leads to a kind of inevitabilism here labelled Metaphysical Fatalism. After the presentation of the argument for Metaphysical Fatalism, three objections to it are discussed and rebutted.

1. A definition, and miscellaneous glosses

(Remark: where possible, context is to disambiguate use-mention; where required, italics are also employed to mark disambiguation. Usage of corner quotes for wffs is throughout dropped.)

In this paper I intend to show that, when supported by a few side assumptions, a certain conception of truth known as Atemporalism, according to which, if a proposition is true (false), then there is neither a time when it is true (false) nor a time when it is not true (false), leads to a kind of inevitabilism that might be dubbed Metaphysical Fatalism.

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**Stipulative Definition (SD):** Metaphysical Fatalism =_{df} under assumptions (i), (ii), (iii) below, nothing is metaphysically possible except the things that did, do, or will, happen.

More in particular, Metaphysical Fatalism is the thesis that, if \( p \) is true (false), then there is no world \( w_i \) such that:

1. assumptions (i)–(iii) below hold at \( w_i \)
2. \( w_i \) has the same initial segment as @
3. \( p \) is false (true) at \( w_i \).

2. **Assumptions**

Assume that the following are true claims about the nature of truth:

1. **Atemporalism:** truth-value is a timeless, tenseless, stable property of truth-bearers.
2. **Semantic bivalence:** truth-values are just two, i.e., truth, falsity.
3. **Equivalence Schema:** ‘\( p \)’ is true iff \( p \).

Atemporalism is a kind of truth-absolutism: if \( p \) is true (false), then its being so does not vary across time or context of utterance, so that truth (falsity) ever qualifies as truth (falsity) *simpliciter*, and it is not possible for a proposition to have different truth-values at different times. The import of (ii) and (iii) is straightforward (or so I take it: I do not mean that they are beyond question; I just mean they are clear-cut enough. Frege, for one, would accept (i) and (iii); possibly, he would accept (ii) too, after due qualifications on sentences including non-denoting names).

3. **The argument for Metaphysical Fatalism, (MF)**

The argument to follow has a model-theoretic shape, even though it is not model-theoretically rigorous, e.g., it is not installed on a formal language, no meta-result is (indeed, can be) established, etc. It need not, however, since that shape is just useful fiction. As a matter of fact, nothing in the argument hinges on model-theory tools and techniques; the shape is conferred only for clarity’s sake.